THE ACTOR'S HERITAGE

SCENES FROM THE THEATRE OF YESTERDAY AND THE DAY BEFORE

John Barrymore as Richard III

BY

WALTER PRICHARD EATON

Shakespeare Drew" still includes English figures, but with the succeeding chapters the scene shifts almost entirely to the early American stage. It is a vivid study of the development of the theatre in

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Walter Richard Eaton
Twin Fires
1924

David Garrick as Richard III

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WALTER PRICHARD EATON

WITH MANY ILLUSTRATIONS

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TO A. E. THOMAS

Do you remember, Tommy, the nights when we used to sit in our rooms six stories up above Washington Square, with the golden cross on its tower gleaming against the sky outside, and talk about the theatre? (Of course you do, but if the "do you remember?" speech is so useful to you, the dramatist, in accomplishing your exposition, why should it be denied to me, the author of a preface?) So — do you remember how we talked of Julia Marlowe as Juliet, whom we had adored in our more youthful youth, and of Mrs. Fiske as Becky, whom we still adored, and of Weber and Fields, whom we had seen that evening? Do you remember how we came home from a bad play determined to write a good one, planning the first act before we went to bed — and forgetting it the next morning? Do you remember how I drove you out into the night so that I could write my Sunday dramatic article in peace, and how you drove me out into the night so you could work on that delightful comedy, Her Husband's Wife? *You were anything but a delightful person when you were writing it. We each, of course, took refuge in a theatre. Do you remember how I used to come home from the auction rooms or the second-hand bookshops with bundles of dusty old volumes under my arm, so that gradually my decrepit theatrical antiquities crowded your proud leather-clad Kiplings into a low corner of our only bookcase? And do you remember how I would read you choice bits of ancient gossip whether you wished to be interrupted or not — a habit no doubt almost as annoying as your own of laughing out loud when something amused you in a book, no matter how*

deeply engrossed I might be in putting on paper my opinion of Ibsen or George M. Cohan?

Do you remember, too, the evenings when we went, always expectant, to the playhouse to see a new play, or better still, the evenings when we wandered up Broadway from theatre to theatre, dropping in on this or that familiar performance to savor again some choice morsel, from The College Widow *at the Garden to* Iris *at the Criterion, — surely you remember Oscar Ashe as Maldonado! — but always stopping at old Wallack's Theatre, to see Charlie Burnham, its manager, who sat in his little office off the lobby and told us how he carried Richard Mansfield, protesting violently, from New York to Boston, in 1886, to play Ko-Ko in* The Mikado *— a performance, by the way, which I witnessed, but which you, being more piously reared, did not? Do you remember all the glamour and delight of those days on Broadway, when we were young, and to be a part of this wonderful thing, the Theatre, was a never-too-much-to-be-savored adventure? Surely you do, because now that we are not so young, there is still a glamour and delight about Broadway, and to be a part of this wonderful thing, the Theatre, is still an endless adventure. It was always so. It always will be so. That is the sole reason why I have written this book. Do you remember, I told you once I was going to? Or were you struggling with your Third Act, and did n't hear me?*

Anyhow, here it is.

W. P. E.

Twin Fires
Sheffield, Massachusetts
1924

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THE ACTOR'S HERITAGE

PROLOGUE

A Franconia Story

How well I remember, as a boy, attending on a summer evening, in a tent pitched close to the village street of Franconia, one of those itinerant productions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* which until recent years were so common throughout the country. In some remote sections they may still be seen, for all I can say, though scarce a town seems now so small that its entertainment does not regularly arrive in an express package — a reel of celluloid. The particular performance of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* that I witnessed in the tent between the rushing Gale River and the village street, a tent filled with smoky light and uncertain shadows, was, I fancy, no less amusing and no less pathetic, to the sophisticated, than scores of others like it. I vaguely recall that Little Eva was actually young, which has not always been the case, and the solitary bloodhound extremely old, which is always the case. I think Eliza leaped over the ice bearing a real infant — doubtless her own. What impressed the occasion on my memory, however, was not the performance itself, but what I later saw.

No sooner had Little Eva ascended to a better,

brighter world — indeed, before she had properly been received into that celestial abode — than Simon Legree, *sans* devilish slouch-hat and boots and whip, was seen to rush forth and begin pulling stay pegs; and before the audience was fairly out of the tent into the starlight and the dusty street, the tent was collapsing over their heads, a van was being backed up to receive it, men with lanterns were bobbing about, and I saw the white-clad figure of the late translated Eva running toward a second van, slowly followed by Uncle Tom. I had walked to the village to be present at this entertainment, a matter of three or four miles, and now I set out home again, leaving the village lights behind, and plodding along in the starlight, the road a dim white ribbon ahead of me, leading toward the vast shadow-bulk of Lafayette which loomed against the sky.

I had gone less than half the distance, I suppose, when I heard behind the crunch of wheels, the creak of harness. A moment later, pulling slowly at a walk up the long hill, the little caravan of the players passed me by. There were three vans, as I recall: two of them enclosed, with tiny windows making them like houses, the third rougher, for the tent and properties. Drivers sat on the front seats of the two forward vans, motionless, fast asleep. Inside the first van, as it passed, I heard a

fretful moan, no doubt from Eliza's child. In the second two people were talking, a man and a woman. I walked rapidly alongside for a few steps, trying to hear what they said, but a sudden growl from the antiquated bloodhound in the baggage-van caused me to duck into the bushes. The last van went by, with a lantern swinging from the projecting tent-poles, and I emerged to watch this light bob and sway as it diminished up the road ahead and vanished around the bend, as if the black shadows of the Notch had swallowed it.

There was no pity in my reflections then, I am sure. Indeed, it appeared rather as an adventure to ride all night in one of those jolly little houses on wheels down the romantic and mysterious Notch. But I have often thought of that procession since, winding its way in the starlight up the long hill, and then under the gaze of the Great Stone Face, and so on all night down the deep defile, to be ready the next day to pitch tent in some other town and once more unfold its ridiculous drama; and I have wondered, as others have wondered before me, why anybody consents to become — or certainly to remain — a strolling player. Yet a very little browsing, not among the dramas or the dramatic criticisms of the past, but rather among those records of the stage which throw an intimate light on the lives of the theatre's people, on the condi-

tions which shape the play that comes to the public a — more or less — finished product, will convince the most skeptic that ever since the rebirth of the theatre in Europe the itinerant company has been the recruiting ground for the metropolitan theatre of literary history; the conditions of the beginning player's lot have been often hard, at times seemingly almost insupportable; and under the blanket title of The Drama, a title which echoes with a thousand noble thrills, have always gone hand in hand the good and the bad, the high and the low, the tragedian and the tight-rope walker, Booth's *Hamlet* and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in a tent.

Nor, indeed, does one need to browse in ancient records to learn such facts about the stage. Even to-day he may talk with many a player famed on Broadway, and hear stories which will surprise him: of provincial dressing-rooms where the leading lady stood on a trunk to keep out of the water on the floor, and threw her shoes at the rats; of a lonely stage child on Christmas Eve, crying in the wings of a theatre in the far West, who, when asked where his mother was, replied, "Down at the depot in a box"; of a successful playwright who once slept in Bryant Park for want of the price of a lodging. The theatre to-day is organized in every department as it never was in the past, the actors, especially, by their union, being economically more

secure. Yet the essential nature of the theatre has not changed; the element of a gamble has not been and never can be, removed from it; the actor is not now, and never can be, made without training, and this training must most often come precariously, in what way and where he can find it. The finished art of the theatre is not a separate and splendidly isolated thing. It is part and parcel of the traveling-caravan show, the cheapest vaudeville, the meanest stock-company. The boy who rises to the peak of the human pyramid in the sawdust ring and then leaps off with a double somersault may be a Molière; the girl who blunders through some melodrama in the remotest provinces may be a Siddons. It has happened — often; and it will always happen. One of America's leading actresses to-day used to sweep the theatre in the West, where she played in her husband's stock company.

At the magic name, Siddons, I think always not of The Tragic Muse, — though perhaps I might if I possessed a mezzotint of that famous painting with Sir Joshua's name on the hem of the actress's garment, — but of a little girl in her father's traveling company in England, making her appearance on the stage of some provincial city to be greeted by the noisy disapproval of the audience, who evidently thought they deserved more matur-

ity for their money. Her mother came to the child's rescue — according to the story — and leading her forward to the footlights, made her repeat the fable of The Boys and The Frogs, which, in Hazlitt's words, "entirely turned the tide of popular opinion in her favor." I have found no account of this incident which states either her exact age at the time or the city in which this extraordinary use of Æsop was made, but, as she was born in 1755, it may be supposed to have occurred somewhere around 1765. At any rate, it shows one of the greatest players who ever lived — greatest in the sense of complete command over the emotions of an audience — to have begun her career as a child actress in a strolling company, and like so many others of her craft, to have absorbed almost unconsciously in earliest years that mysterious technical assurance and ease of execution which mark the commanding actor.

This strolling company in which the future Mrs. Siddons made her infantile début was managed by her father, Roger Kemble. Her mother, a constant player in it save for the periodic interruptions due to the arrival of new Kembles, was the daughter of John Ward, also a strolling player and manager. (In 1746, Ward gave a performance of *Othello* in Stratford, donating the receipts to repair Shakespeare's monument in the church.)

Mrs. Siddons as Sigismunda

It seems to have been a common thing in those days for traveling companies to be composed of the manager, his wife, and as many children as possible. Each player, according to custom, got one share of the receipts, except the manager, who got two or more shares. If the manager's offspring were old enough to assume adult rôles, just so much money was kept in the family! Such parts as the manager's family could not fill, were taken care of by other actors, admitted into the company.

In the Kemble family, Sarah was the eldest child, and two years later John Philip Kemble was born. He, like his sister, acted with the company as a child, though he was sent away to a Catholic school when old enough, the father being a member of the Roman Church and — like so many other actors — wishing his sons ultimately to follow some other profession than the stage. Other little Kembles followed fast, till Charles, born in 1775, was recorded as the eleventh. Roger Kemble, the father and manager, appears to have been a man considerably superior to many of his class in the profession, in scholarly, artistic, and business attainments. His wife, in later years, confided to James Boaden, author of memoirs of both her famous daughter and her most famous son, that Roger was "the only 'gentleman' Falstaff she ever saw." His traveling company seems to have prospered

sufficiently, at least, to enable him to educate his sons, and probably he never resorted to such expedients as that recorded by Boaden in the memoirs of Mrs. Siddons.

"A man of good character, with an amiable wife and many children," says Boaden, "spoke strongly to the feelings of the gentry in opulent districts"; and to illustrate the manner in which he spoke, the historian quotes an "invitation," evidently distributed by hand to the gentry in and around East Grinstead.

At the old theatre in East Grinstead, on Saturday, May 1, 1758, will be represented (by particular desire, and for the benefit of Mrs. P——) the deep and affecting tragedy of *Theodosius, or The Force of Love*, with magnificent scenes, dresses, etc.

VARANES by Mr. P—— who will strive, as far as possible, to support the character of this fiery Persian Prince, in which he was so much admired and applauded at Hastings, Arundel, Petworth, Midworth, Lewes, &c.

THEODOSIUS by a young gentleman from the University of Oxford, who never appeared on any stage.

ATHENAIS by Mrs. P——. Though her present condition will not permit her to wait on gentlemen and ladies out of the town with tickets, she hopes, as on former occasions, for their liberality and support.

Nothing in Italy can exceed the altar in the first scene of the play. Nevertheless, should any of the Nobility or Gentry wish to see it ornamented with flowers, the

bearer will bring away as many as they choose to favour him with.

As the coronation of Athenais, to be introduced in the fifth act, contains a number of personages, more than sufficient to fill all the dressing rooms, &c., it is hoped no gentlemen and ladies will be offended, at being refused admission behind the scenes.

N.B. The great yard-dog, that made so much noise on Thursday night, during the last act of *King Richard the Third*, will be sent to a neighbour's over the way; and on account of the prodigious demand for places, part of the stable will be laid into the boxes on one side, and the granary open for the same purpose, on the other.

Vivat Rex

It seems impossible to improve upon Boaden's comment which follows this invitation: —

"Alas! and human hearts have beat high with hope from temptations such as this; and a mother has thus uneasily struggled to obtain future comfort for the ripened fruit of her womb! The smile on such occasions hurries to the eye; but finds that tender observer of life already admonished and in tears."

Roger Kemble probably resorted to no such appeals as this, and the little Sarah Kemble, afterward to be the most famous actress of the English stage, probably spent a comparatively comfortable and happy girlhood, — indeed, stage children are usually happy.

SCENE I

An Eighteenth-century Strolling Player

(Pages from the Life of Thomas Holcroft)

There was one member of the Kemble company — for a brief time in 1771 — who in his career as an actor experienced, it would seem almost to excess, the discomforts and unhappiness of a strolling player. This was Thomas Holcroft, actor, dramatist, novelist, pacifist, republican, friend of Godwin and later of Hazlitt, and now probably forgotten even as a name by all save a very few. I cheerfully and unashamedly admit that I never read one of his novels, and naturally I have never seen one of his plays, though I have read one or two of them. His most successful novel was called *Hugh Trevor*, and his most famous play was *The Road to Ruin*, which survived well into the nineteenth century. He was also the translator of *The Marriage of Figaro*, making a special trip to Paris to steal the text — but of that more anon. Thomas Holcroft lives for me because, shortly after his death in 1809, there were published in three small volumes, the *Memoirs of Thomas Holcroft, written by himself and continued to the time of his death, from his diary, notes, and other papers.* Actually, he himself, while

on his deathbed, dictated but a part of the first volume, comprising memoirs of his boyhood, up to his sixteenth year. The remainder of the work was completed by William Hazlitt, who knew him rather intimately in his latter years, and who also knew the English stage. In these three little volumes, the first one containing a mezzotint portrait of Holcroft by Blood, showing a man of plain features but of honest seriousness with rather fine eyes, is a record not only of an actor's struggle against the hard conditions of the stroller's lot in the England of the eighteenth century, but of a spirit's struggle against all manner of opposition and adversity, which might easily have prompted a more sentimental writer than Hazlitt to much moralizing. The net impression of Holcroft, from this memoir and from the record of his work, is that of a man who made much out of a very little, who with scarce a spark of genius rose from a stable jockey to a successful playwright at Covent Garden and Drury Lane, through the thorny and difficult path of the strolling player.

Thomas Holcroft was born in London, on the tenth day of December 1745, "old style," as he records. He was baptized and his name registered in St. Martin's church, where "my name is erroneously written Howlcroft." He does not assume, however, that the recorder was indulging in a

possibly pertinent pun, but rather that his family paid small attention to matters of orthography. Indeed, the family appears to have been most obscure and humble, and his own father a man who stuck to nothing long and was often close to actual want.

Dictated in his last illness, often — Hazlitt records — with long pauses for breath, the account Holcroft has left of his pathetic childhood yet contains no note of bitterness, and nothing but affection for a father who led the family over most of England, one hardship following another, and who set the boy to tasks far beyond his years and sometimes punished him for delaying on the road by dragging him about by the hair or the ears. This father, on the other hand, was apparently inordinately proud of his son's ability to read at a tender age, and between them a lasting bond seems to have existed.

The family, on a peddling trip, once reached the Isle of Ely, which in his last years Holcroft remembered chiefly for: —

> those then dear and delightful creatures, a quack doctor, peeping from behind his curtain, and that droll devil, his merry Andrew, apparitions first beheld by me at Wisbeach fair. It was a pleasure so unexpected, so exquisite, so rich and rare, that I followed the merry Andrew and his drummer through the streets, gliding

THOMAS HOLCROFT

Engraving by Blood

under arms and between legs, never long together three yards apart from him; almost bursting with laughter at his extreme comicality; tracing the gridirons, punchinellos, and pantomime figures on his jacket; wondering at the manner in which he twirled his hat in the air and again caught it so dexterously on his head. My curiosity did not abate when he examined to see if there was not some little devil hid within it, with a grotesque squint of his eyes, twist of his nose, and the exclamation, "Oh, ho! have I caught you, Mr. Imp?" — making a snatch at the inside of his hat, grasping at something, opening his hand, finding nothing in it, and then crying with a stupid stare: "No, you see, good folks, the devil of any devil is here!" Then again, when he returned to the stage, followed by an eager crowd, and in an imperious tone was ordered by his master to mount, to see the comical jump he gave, alighting half upright, roaring with pretended pain, pressing his hip, declaring he had put out his collar bone, crying to his master to come and cure it, receiving a kick, springing up and making a somerset; thanking his master kindly for making him well; yet, the moment his back was turned, mocking him with wry faces; answering the doctor — whom I should have thought extremely witty, if Andrew had not been there — with jokes so apposite and whimsical as never failed to produce roars of laughter. All this was to me assuredly "the feast of reason and the flow of soul!"

As it was the first scene of the kind I had ever witnessed, so it was the most ecstatic. I think it by no means improbable that an ardent love of the dramatic art took root in my mind from the accidents of that day.

Again the drama links hands with vaudeville, and we catch a glimpse of what is, after all, the fundamental of the theatre — the impulse to entertain.

From Ely the family continued their wanderings, the father evidently by turn peddler of rags, hardware, buckles, buttons, pewter spoons, and pottery which he procured in Staffordshire and hawked through the North of England. (Some of us would welcome him to-day with open arms, if he could bring us those identical dishes!) At this time the poor child often added to the family income by taking an ass to the coal mines, all by himself, getting it loaded, and then piloting ass and load back through clay roads, often deeply rutted, to sell the fuel in town. It was, perhaps, no wonder that the boy suffered terribly from asthma, but rather more wonder that he recovered from it by the truly marvelous treatment volunteered by "an intelligent surgeon" in Nottingham. This surgeon manifested his intelligence by causing "an issue" to be made "and carefully kept open on the inside of each leg below the knee." To the boy himself was entrusted the daily treatment of the perforations. His recovery began at once and continued rapidly, "aided, no doubt," he says, "by my youth and cheerful temperament."

Soon after he was apprenticed as a stable boy and

jockey, when he exercised race horses and continued to read whatever he could get, in spite of the gibes of the other boys. The atmosphere certainly could not have been congenial to a youth so sensitive; and when his year was up he fled back to his father, who had now returned to the vocation of cobbling in London, and became himself a cobbler's assistant. He seems, however, to have applied himself more to books than to shoe-leather. In 1764, when nineteen, he traveled with his father to Liverpool, and a year later he was married, but to whom, or what on, is not stated by his biographer. We hear no more of this first wife, and soon find Holcroft back in London at his bench, but also studying arithmetic, in which he had advanced as far as fractions, and a bit of geometry and geography; and, Hazlitt adds, "he had made himself a complete master of vocal music." Whether on the strength of his arithmetic or of his complete mastery of vocal music, he now attempted to set up a day school somewhere in the country, where for three months he lived on potatoes and buttermilk, and had but one scholar. So he returned to London, and became a semi-secretary, semi-domestic servant in a London house, from which he was presently discharged because he persisted in frequenting a "spouting club."

The "spouting club" was rather a London insti-

tution of those days, more or less like the amateur dramatic clubs of our times, save that the members were all young men, and plays were not performed in public, but merely rehearsed at club meetings. There were, however, no dramatic schools then, and sufficient odium attached to the profession of acting to limit the number of amateur aspirants much more than is at present the case. Accordingly, it would appear from Holcroft's case that the professional actors and managers sometimes recruited their companies from the ranks of the spouters, even employing scouts to keep them informed of promising material. At any rate, Holcroft, once more on the streets of London, without money and, so far as his historian records, mysteriously minus a recent wife, was hastening toward a recruiting office to enlist as a soldier in the service of the East India Company, — those were, after all, the palmy days for imperialistic exploiters of backward peoples! — when he was met by a fellow member of his spouting club, who suggested that he first try to get a job with Macklin, then about to take a company to Dublin. Holcroft's friend — according to Hazlitt, who probably had it from Holcroft — was employed by Macklin for the purpose of picking up promising talent, it being, Hazlitt says, "one of this actor's passions to make actors of others, though he was in some respects the worst qualified

for the office of any man in the world." It may be true that Macklin enjoyed training the young, but hardly likely that he did so for pure love. He must have needed them for his company, and found this an effective — perhaps a cheap — way to get them.

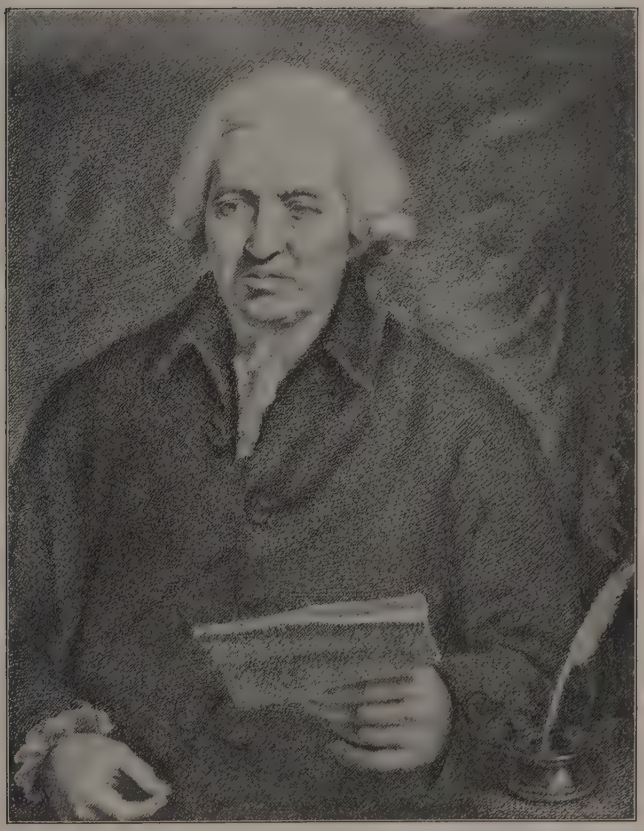
Charles Macklin, whose real name was McLaughlin, was an extraordinary figure. Dr. Doran and others say that he was born in Ireland in 1690. He surely died in London in 1797. In the village cemetery of Landaff, New Hampshire, is the grave of the Widow Susannah Brownson, who was born in 1698 and died in 1802, but it is not recorded that the widow created, as Macklin did, a long and arduous rôle — that of Sir Pertinax Macsycophant in his own once famous play, *The Man of the World* — at the ripe age of ninety, or continued to play Shylock to the age of ninety-nine! Macklin's memory broke down, forcing him finally from the stage in 1788. There is no doubt he was then a very old man, but whether ninety-eight or in reality only eighty-eight is open to some question. At any rate he had earned his rest, for he had been sixty-four years on the stage, not counting his early years as a strolling player. Aside from his authorship of *Love à la Mode*, produced at Drury Lane in 1759, and *The Man of the World*, produced twenty-one years later, theatrical history best remembers him

for his break in the tradition of acting Shylock.

Macklin was uncouth and eccentric in his private life, impetuous and hot-tempered, with many friends and more enemies. And when young Holcroft, abandoning at once his plan to enlist for the wars, arranged an interview with the great man, — then going on seventy or eighty years, as you choose to believe, — he came at once in contact with the uncouthness and eccentricity.

Hazlitt has left us a vivid record of that first interview. The scout friend and the young aspirant proceeded to the place of appointment.

> They found the great man seated on his couch, which stood by the fire and on which, whenever he felt himself tired or drowsy, he went to rest both day and night; so that he sometimes was not in bed for a fortnight together. As they went in, they were followed by his wife, who brought him a basin of tea and some toast, with each of which he found fifty faults in the rudest manner. He afterwards called to her several times, upon the most frivolous occasions, when she was dignified with the style and title of Bess. His countenance, as it appeared to Mr. Holcroft at this interview, was the most forbidding he had ever beheld; and age, which had deprived him of his teeth, had not added to its softness. After desiring the young candidate to sit down, he eyed him narrowly for some time, and then asked him, What had put it into his head to turn actor? The abruptness of the question disconcerted him; and it was some time before he could answer, in rather a confused



CHARLES MACKLIN IN HIS NINETY-THIRD YEAR

Engraved by Condé from the painting by Opie

manner, that he had taken it into his head to suppose it was genius, but that it was very possible he might be mistaken. "Yes," said he, "that's possible enough; and by G—d, Sir, you are not the first I have known so mistaken." Holcroft smiled at his satire, and the other grinned ghastly with his leathern lips, for our tyro had not added to the beauty of his visage by repeating his words. While Macklin was drinking his tea, they talked on indifferent subjects; and as Holcroft did not happen to differ with him, but on the contrary had opportunities of saying several things which confirmed his opinions, he was pleased to allow that he had the appearance of an ingenious young man. When his beverage was finished, he desired him to speak a speech out of some play, which being done, he remarked that he had never in his life heard a young spouter speak naturally, and therefore he was not surprised that Holcroft did not; but, as he seemed tractable, and willing to learn, if he would call again on the morrow, he would hear and answer him further.

When they had descended into the street, Holcroft's companion assured him "it would do," for that he had met with a very favorable reception; which was indeed the case, considering the character of the person to whom their visit had been paid.

While waiting for the morrow to come, Holcroft learned that Foote, the famous wit and actor-manager, was enlisting a company to take to Edinburgh, so he hastened at once to see that gentleman, in case the other venture should fall through. Foote was the man to whom Macklin

once said, "Do you know what I am going to say, sir?" and who replied, "No, do you?"

Foote set the young man to reciting one part in *Venice Preserved*, while his secretary spouted the opposing rôle. When he had stood it as long as he could, quite amiably, he stopped them and then told the aspirant he seemed to "imagine that all excellence lies in the lungs." He then read the scene himself, so well that Holcroft was surprised, having supposed him only a comedian. Foote then allowed the young man to exhibit those powers of vocal music of which mention has already been made, and ultimately invited him to join his company at a pound a week. Before accepting, Holcroft went back to Macklin with information of the other offer, and the upshot was that he was finally engaged by the Irish actor, as prompter and for small parts, at thirty shillings a week, and told to set out for Dublin at once. Macklin lent him six guineas for his passage. He gave one guinea to his spouting friend, — here we see the theatrical agency in its infancy, — redeemed some of his clothes from pawn, and set out, "elated with the most flattering hopes": the cobbler's boy, the little beggar and peddler, the stable jockey, an actor at last at twenty-five, in the company of the great Macklin!

Alas, the first thing he discovered in Dublin was

that the theatre's promises and its fulfillment are not always the same. The engagement was to open in October. It did not begin till November and he had to borrow more money to live. (It was not till 1919 that the actor in America succeeded in compelling payment for rehearsals, and he had to do it then by joining a labor union.) He also discovered that the manager of the company did not like him; his salary was reduced to a guinea; and all Macklin's promises of opportunities to act in small parts went unfulfilled, either because this manager got Macklin's ear first or because he had lost his first interest in the new player. Holcroft endured these wounds to his pride and purse for five months, at which time his debts were cancelled by deductions from his salary and the manager immediately discharged him. Having no contract, there was nothing to do about it except to seek Macklin out and tell him what he thought of him, which he accordingly did. Being without funds, he then went to a rival theatre and secured an engagement at the same salary; but this manager had no money to pay any salary, as Holcroft soon discovered, and so, in March 1771, he took a packet for England.

As soon as he arrived at Chester, in England, he wrote letters to all the traveling companies he could hear of, asking for a job, and setting forth his

musical attainments and his "recent arrival from the Dublin theatre." This, it seems, was enough, for he got several favorable replies and closed with a company then playing at Leeds. Here he found, to his sorrow, that the actors were despised in the town, and their finances in disorder; but he also discovered "how necessary practice is to the profession of a player, and perceived that, though some of his new associates could scarcely read, they could all, from the mere force of habit, speak better on the stage than he could."

But he had small chance for practice there, for in a few weeks the company went on the rocks, and dissolved. "Our luckless hero," as Hazlitt called him, had nothing to do but to walk a hundred and sixty miles across country to Hereford, where another company which had offered him a job might possibly still be playing.

On the fifth day he entered an inn twenty-eight miles from his destination, with ninepence in his pocket, and departed penniless the next morning. He may then have been a bad actor, but he was surely no bad walker, to maintain over twenty-seven miles a day for five days! On the sixth day he found difficulty in making twenty-eight miles on an empty stomach, but he reached Hereford at four o'clock, and learned from the first man he met, to his vast joy, that the company was still in town.

The year was 1771, and the company was that of Roger Kemble, and Sarah Kemble, his eldest child, was sixteen years old and a member of the troupe. It is rather extraordinary, considering the fame she later achieved, that Holcroft left no stories or memories of her for his biographer to employ. On the occasion of her London début, he wrote her a friendly letter, showing that he recalled their earlier association, but while he was with the company, acting small parts, — "bits," as the players now call them, — an actor named Downing, or Dunning, and also his wife, seem chiefly to have impressed the young man. Of them he left an amusing description.

"This stage hero had a large, red, bottle-nose, with little intellect; but he was tall, looked passably when made up for the stage, and had a tolerable voice, though monotonous. To hide the redness of his nose, it was his custom to powder it; but unluckily he drank brandy; the humour that flowed to his nose made it irritable, and in the course of a scene the powder was usually rubbed off. His wife stood behind the scenes with the powder-puff, and exclaimed when he came off: —

" 'Lord! Curse it, George! how you rub your poor nose! Come here, and let me powder it. Do you think Alexander the Great had such a nose? I am sure Juliet would never have married Romeo with

such a bottle-nose. Upon my word, if your nose had been so red, and large, when you ran away with me from the boarding-school, I should never have stepped into the same chaise with you and your journeyman captain, I assure you.'

"George seldom made any reply to these harangues, except 'Pshaw, woman!' or by beginning to repeat his part.

"Mrs. D——, who also was addicted to drink, thus narrated the idyl of her courtship and marriage, to Mrs. Kemble, who repeated it as follows:—

He calls himself Downing, Ma'am, but his name is Dunning. I was a Quaker, Ma'am, when he first knew me, and put to a boarding-school. He and one Chalmers — I suppose you have heard of that Chalmers, he gave himself the title of Captain — Well, Ma'am, while I was at the boarding-school, they came a-courting to me. Dunning, my husband that you see there, was a tall handsome fellow enough; he had not such a bottle-nose then, Ma'am, not such spindle legs; so he put on a coat edged with gold lace — I don't know where he got it — and gave himself the airs of a gentleman. He thought I was a great fortune; but, God help me, I had not a shilling; and I believed him to be what he pretended, when all the while he was no better than a barber; and this Captain Chalmers was his journeyman. So they persuaded me, innocent fool, to run away with them, thinking they had got a prize, and I thought the same; so the biter on both sides was bit. So that is the history, Ma'am, of me and Mr. Dunning."

There has always been something rather engaging to me about the Downings. They are the sort of people Tom Jones might have encountered. They are the sort of people he did encounter! But they are also the sort of people who supported Sarah Siddons in the classic drama, when she was learning her profession. The theatre works in a mysterious way its wonders to perform.

But in spite of the opportunity to profit by the companionship of the Downings, Holcroft presently left the Kemble company, because of an unrecorded misunderstanding with the manager. It may have been due to the actor's desire to play larger parts. He now joined the company of an actor named Stanton, which performed in Birmingham and the North of England. A note made at this time by Holcroft, gives an idea of the business arrangements of such an organization: —

A company of travelling comedians, then, is a small kingdom, of which the manager is the monarch. Their code of laws seems to have existed with few material variations since the days of Shakespeare, who is, with great reason, the god of their idolatry. The person who is rich enough to furnish a wardrobe and scenes, commences manager, and has his privileges accordingly: if there are twenty persons in the company, for instance, the manager included, the receipts of the house, after all incidental expenses are deducted, are divided into four and twenty shares, four of which are called dead shares

and taken by the manager as payment for the use of his dresses and scenes; to these is added the share to which he is entitled as a performer. Our manager (Stanton) has five sons and daughters all ranked as performers; so that he sweeps eleven shares, that is, near half the profits of the theatre, into his pocket every night. This is a continual subject of discontent to the rest of the actors, who are all, to a man, disaffected to the higher powers. They are, however, most of them in debt to the manager, and of course chained to his galley: a circumstance which he does not fail to remind them of, whenever they are refractory.

They appear to be a set of merry, thoughtless beings, who laugh in the midst of poverty and who never want a quotation or a story to recruit their spirits. When they get any money they seem in haste to spend it, lest some tyrant in the shape of a dun should snatch it from them. They have a circuit or set of towns, to which they resort when the time comes round; so that there are but three or four in our company who are not well known in ——. I observe that the townspeople are continually railing at them, yet are exceedingly unhappy if they fail to return at the appointed time. It is a saying among us, that a player's sixpence does not go as far as a townsman's groat; therefore, though the latter are continually abusing them for running in debt, they take good care to indemnify themselves, and are no great losers if they get ten shillings in the pound.

While Holcroft was with Stanton or shortly before, he married again, his first wife having evidently died, leaving him with one child — a

daughter. By his second wife, "a sister of Mr. Tripler of Nottingham," he had two more children: a son in 1773 and a daughter in 1775. In bearing the second child, the wife died. It was during the brief years of their marriage that privations seem to have come thickest upon Holcroft. On his own death, Hazlitt found what he calls "a sort of Shandean manuscript" in which Holcroft had set down at the time some of his trials, and in which this passage occurs: —

> Oh Matilda! shall I ever forget thy tenderness and resignation? Or when in the bitterness of despair, beholding thee pregnant, wan with watching thy sick infant, and sitting assiduously at thy needle to earn a morsel of bread — when thou hast beheld the salt rheum of biting anguish scald my agonizing cheek, with what tender love, what mild, what sweet persuasive patience thou hast comforted my soul, and made even misery smile in hope and fond forgetfulness! Richer than all the monarchs of the East, Matilda, has thy kindness made me: the world affords not thy equal!

It is a little difficult to-day to get up any profound sympathy with a man who wrote like this. Yet we have no reason to suppose that he did not mean it, that "the salt rheum of biting anguish" did not actually scald his "agonizing" cheek — in short, that he did not love his wife. It simply shows the effect of the eighteenth-century drama

— and especially the new sentimental comedy — on a man who was considerably less than a genius. We have our sentimental styles to-day, and we have artificial dialogue in drama and in comedy, but Heaven knows we can produce nothing quite so terrible as this: not even Mrs. Gene Stratton Porter at her most eloquent.

Holcroft left Stanton's company in 1774 and joined Booth. In a letter seeking employment —

> he engaged to perform all the old men, and principal low-comedy characters; he was to be the music, that is, literally the sole accompaniment to all songs, &c., on his fiddle in the orchestra; he undertook to instruct the younger performers in singing and music, and to write out the different casts or parts in every new comedy; and, lastly, he was to furnish the theatre with several new pieces, never published, but which he brought with him in manuscript, among the rest, *Doctor Last in His Chariot*, which character he himself performed.
>
> Here was certainly enough for one man to do; and for all these services, various and important as they were, he stipulated that he should be entitled to a share and a half of the profits of the theatre, which generally amounted to between four and five pounds a night whenever it opened, that is, three times a week. This proposed salary could not, therefore, amount to more than seventeen or eighteen shillings weekly.

And — the reader of to-day is disposed to add — he would certainly earn it!

Hazlitt makes an interesting note on one item in this list, the performance of Doctor Last.

In the above list of employments which Mr. Holcroft undertook to fulfill, the capital attraction, and that which he believed no country manager could resist, was the character of Doctor Last, which he did in imitation of the London performers. The scene in which he produced the most effect was that of the doctor's examination. This, as I have heard it described, was a very laughable, if not a very pleasing performance. Mr. Holcroft was naturally rather long-backed; and in order to give a ridiculous appearance to the doctor he used to lean forwards, with his chin raised as high as possible into the air and his body projecting proportionably behind, and in this frog-like attitude, with his eyes staring wide open and his teeth chattering, he answered the questions that were put to him, in a harsh, tremulous voice, sometimes growling and sometimes squeaking, and with such odd starts and twitches of countenance that the effect produced upon the generality of spectators was altogether convulsive. The person who gave me this description said he thought the part a good deal overdone, but that it was a very entertaining caricature.

Booth evidently accepted the services of so versatile and willing a performer, and also of Mrs. Holcroft, whom her husband had taught to sing. This Booth also was a versatile creature, who painted portraits and invented a process of making cloth without spinning, as side issues. Indeed, when the

company was not playing, he still continued to find portrait work to do, and fattened on likenesses taken for half-a-guinea while his company starved. That the company were at times close to want is attested by a letter written by Holcroft to the great David Garrick, with an original poem enclosed. Garrick, of course, was then close to the end of his reign at Drury Lane: he died four years later. But he was still the most potent figure in the theatre of England — indeed, of the world — and as a price for his greatness was constantly besieged by applicants for positions, even by applicants for charity. The nearest approach to Garrick in our day and country would be David Belasco, whose fame as a manager has necessitated the erection around him of an almost impenetrable wall of secretaries and henchmen, to guard him from the importunities of untried talent.

How much Holcroft's letter was due to actual necessity and how much to a natural desire to get into the London theatres, we cannot say. Probably the necessity existed, and he saw a chance to dramatize it. His letter tells how he is three hundred miles from London, with his wife sick at an inn and his company about to break up. He says he understands music, "something of French and fencing," and has "a very quick memory, as I can repeat any part under four lengths at six-hours' notice."

He has studied, he says, "character, dress, situation, deliberation, enunciation, but above all the eye and the manner." The letter, however, is scarcely more egotistical than any player would write, setting forth his qualifications for employment, and it is well expressed. It is dated: "Cockermouth, in Cumberland, June 1st, 1775, at the house of George Bowes, hatter."

He added a postcript: "With respect to the trifling poem enclosed, I meant only to ease my own heart by it; should it reach yours, it will be more than I can expect."

We think Holcroft made a fatal error in enclosing this poem. We may be wrong, but we have always attributed to Garrick a sense of humor, and surely nobody with a sense of humor, even in the eighteenth century, even a friend of Doctor Johnson, could seriously consider giving the author of this effusion a job. It would have been like making the Sweet Singer of Michigan editor of *Harper's Magazine*. But, lest you question our judgment, here is the poem. Read it for yourself.

HOPE
or
THE DELUSION

Advance, soft soother of the mind,
  Oh! hither bend, a welcome guest:
Sweet Hope! stray hither, here thou'lt find
  Those sanguine thoughts that please thee best.

Fair Fancy bring, thy darling child,
Decked in loose robes of Alpine white:
With thee, her happy Parent, wild
She wings her bold romantic flight.

Blest pair! I'll sing, inspir'd by you,
Of wealth bestow'd to noble ends,
Of sweet enchanting scenes in view,
Of future times and faithful friends.

Tho' my sweet William, prattling youth,
For bread oft begs in accents meek;
Matilda, fairest flower of truth,
Droops on my breast her dew-dipt cheek.

Tho' the big tears run down my face
To see her aspect wan and mild,
And hear her lov'd affection trace
My care-mark'd features in our child,

Tho' fortune lowly bows my neck,
And cares not for the wretch's groan —
Yet smile but Hope, or Fancy beck,
And I'll ascend her star-built throne.

Now, now I mount! Behold me rise!
Hope lends me strength and Fancy wings,
Oh! listen to the magic lies
Which fleeting, faithless Fancy sings!

With Independence truly blest,
Of some neat cot she styles me lord,
Where Age and Labour love to rest,
Where healthy viands press the board.

Now lay me down, kind nymph, at ease
Beneath yon verdant mountain's brow,
Where wanton zephyrs fan the trees,
Where violets spring, and waters flow.

What joys — delusive charmer, hold!
Despair has seized my thick'ning blood;
Her lips how pale! Her cheek how cold!
Matilda faints for want of food!

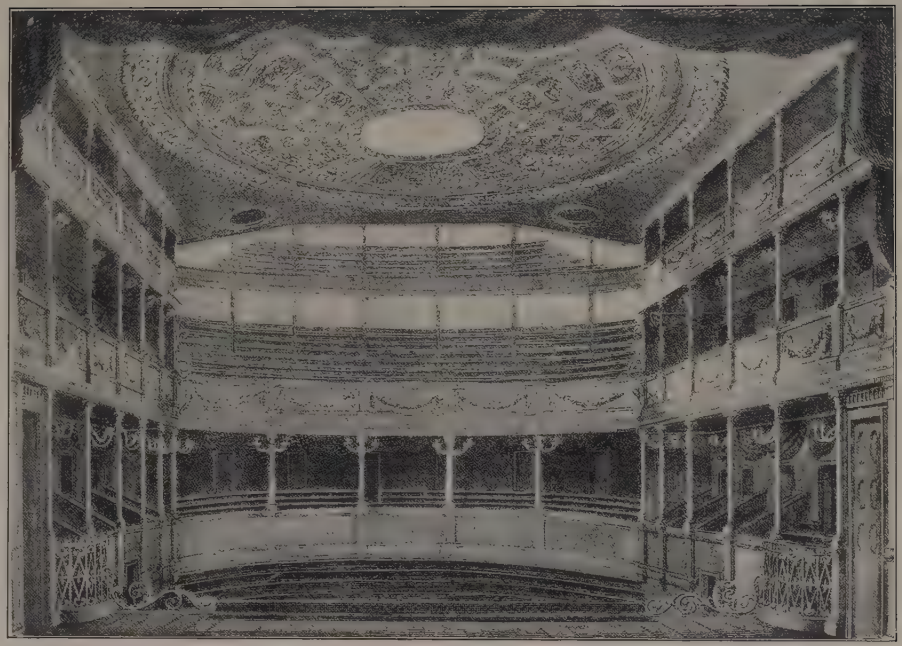
Alas! whatever the reason, Garrick did nothing to revive Matilda from her swoon, and shortly after the poor creature died, evidently from lack of nourishment.

In 1777 we find Holcroft in a company managed by one Bates, and employing his time between performances in reading Lowth's *Grammar* and Pope's Homer, and in conversation with Shield, the composer, then a young man employed in the company band. The parts he was acting included Polonius, Scrub in *The Beaux' Stratagem*, Bundle in *The Waterman*, Abel Drugger, and occasionally Hamlet. The poet Cunningham was also a member of the company, acting fops. Holcroft remained but a short time with this organization, in which congenial companionship had evidently sharpened his ambition. He went up to London the same year, with the benefit of seven years of practical — if bitter — stage experience behind him, and at once applied for work to Sheridan, who had just come into command at Drury Lane and produced *The School for Scandal.* Failing both here and at Covent Garden, he sat down and wrote a farce, *The Crisis; or Love and Famine*, which Mrs. Sheridan,

— through the graces of a cousin of his who knew her — was prevailed upon to read. The farce and his ability to sing secured him an engagement at Drury Lane for twenty shillings a week.

After a year in Sheridan's company Holcroft found himself getting nowhere, and was obliged to write a long letter of complaint to the manager. He was, he declared, "depressed, dejected, chained by Misfortune to the rock of Despair, while the vultures Poverty and Disappointment are feasting with increase of appetite upon me." He was threatened with an increased deduction of nine shillings a week from his salary, and without any deductions he was entitled to only sixty pounds a year. The prompter, of course, was to blame, assigning Holcroft "to sit in a senate or at a card table, or to sing in a chorus" instead of giving him a speaking part. That Holcroft himself may have profited less than he supposed by his seven years of fitful playing in provincial companies, and that he lacked the finish and the grace of person to please a London audience, does not occur to him. It infrequently occurs to any actor.

Whether it occurred to Sheridan we shall never know. Sheridan himself was quite too busy just then with his own eternal financial difficulties to make any reply at all to poor Holcroft's appeal, and Holcroft in the summer vacations of 1778 and 1779



THE DRURY LANE THEATRE AT THE END OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

From a contemporary print

made excursions to the country, with various traveling companies, to increase his revenue. He had married for a third time almost as soon as he reached London, and had taken too large a house, involving himself in financial difficulties. The poor man seems never to have been free of them.

In 1780 he published a novel, in two small volumes, entitled *Alwyn, or, The Gentleman Comedian.* Hazlitt tries hard to say a good word for it, but without much success. He also wrote a libretto for the son of Doctor Arne to set to music, but nothing came of that except a quarrel. In 1781 his first comedy, *Duplicity,* was accepted by Harris, manager of Covent Garden, and was produced with some success. All he made on it was a hundred pounds, but it definitely set him on the road toward authorship, for which he was apparently better fitted than for acting. Though Sheridan had finally raised his salary to two pounds a week, he secured prospect of enough correspondence and translating to give him a living if he went to Paris, and in 1783 he left London and the stage to embark on a new career.

To follow him further is no part of our purpose. Any reader who wishes to do so will find considerable of interest in Hazlitt's memoir, especially in the quotations from Holcroft's own journal. In after years, such fame as came to him was chiefly

won by his comedies, and by his arrest in 1794 on a charge of high treason. The circumstances under which he was arrested are of interest to-day, and not without their significance.

As he grew older, Holcroft's natural seriousness of mind developed in him an interest in philosophical questions — accounting probably for his friendship with Godwin — and after the early days of the French Revolution, he, like so many others, dreamed of applying reason to political governmental forms and hastening the development of a better social order. In 1792 he joined the Society for Constitutional Information, which was composed of men who, like himself, were ardent believers in new dispensations and wished to study ways to make their beliefs effective in action. Some of them were no doubt impatient and hot-headed, but in their discussions Holcroft was a persistent advocate of peaceful revolution: progress by education. Ignorance he believed to be society's worst foe, and punishment, violence, rancor, suppression, to be evils. Only the cure of ignorance by the peaceful spread of more enlightened principles would accomplish any lasting good.

However, the Ministry and the aristocratic party — "the forces of privilege," in the language of to-day — did not agree with him, and against all activities of "republican levelers"

THIRTY-FIRST NIGHT.

At the Theatre-Royal in Covent-Garden.

This present THURSDAY, April 26, 1792,
Will be presented a NEW COMEDY, called, THE

ROAD TO RUIN.

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS BY
Mr. LEWIS,
Mr. QUICK,
Mr. HOLMAN,
Mr. WILSON,
Mr. MUNDEN,
Mr. HARLEY,
Mrs. MERRY,
Mrs. HARLOWE, Mrs. POWELL,
And Mrs. MATTOCKS.

After which will be performed, (for the 3d Time) a Dramatic Romance, in 2 Acts, call

ZELMA:

OR,

The WILL o'th' WISP.

With New Scenery, Machinery, Dresses, and Decorations.
The MUSIC Selected from DITTERS, RAUZZINI, and SALIERI,
The OVERTURE and New MUSIC Composed by Mr. REEVE.
THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS BY
Mr. INCLEDON,
Mr. MUNDEN, Mr. HULL,
Mr. DAVIES, Mr. THOMPSON,
Mrs. MARTYR,
Miss CHAPMAN,
And Madame CARNAVALE,
(Being her 3d Appearance on the English Stage.)
THE OTHER MUSICAL CHARACTERS BY
Miss BROADHURST,
Miss Stuart, Mrs. Watts, Mrs. Arnold, Miss Francis, Miss Yeoens, Miss Barnett, Miss Leserve, Mrs. Mahers,
And Mrs. MOUNTAIN.

*** Books of the Songs to be had at the Theatre.
NO MONEY TO BE RETURNED.

This Evening the Doors of the Theatre will be Opened at Half after Five, and the Performance begin at Half after Six.

Tomorrow (by Particular Desire) the Comedy of WILD OATS, or, The Strolling Gentlemen.
With the Comic Opera of The POOR SOLDIER.

Playbill of Holcroft's "The Road to Ruin"

repressive measures began to be taken. How like certain recent happenings this sounds! — the words are Hazlitt's: —

> Men even of respectable characters and honest intentions now thought it an heroical act of duty to watch the conduct of their intimate friends, excite them to utter violent or seditious expressions, and afterwards to turn informers against the intemperance they had provoked. When Holcroft first heard that certain members of his society had been taken into custody, he said: "Surely, either there have been practices of which I am totally ignorant, or men are running mad!"

Men, of course, were running mad. We in our day have seen how easy that is. Finally, in 1794 Holcroft with several others, was indicted. He at once surrendered himself and was committed to jail. The *St. James Chronicle* thus reported the incident: —

> Mr. Holcroft, the playwright and performer, pretty well known for the democratical sentiments which he has industriously scattered through the lighter works of literature, such as plays, novels, songs, &c., surrendered himself on Tuesday at Clerkenwell Sessions House, requesting to know if he was the person against whom the Grand Jury has found a Bill for High Treason. After some little altercation, in which Mr. Holcroft seemed to affect some consequence, he was ordered into custody. This gentleman seems so fond of speechifying that he will probably plead his own cause in part,

though Counsel were assigned him. We do not understand he is in any imminent danger; and suppose, from his behaviour, he has the idea of obtaining the reputation of a martyr to liberty at an easy rate. We have that respect for some efforts of his talents, that we really hope his vanity will be gratified with having run the danger, without suffering the punishment, of a traitor!

This newspaper report, too, has a familiar ring!

While locked up for eight weeks, Holcroft prepared a defense, but he was never allowed to "speechify." There was no real evidence against him or against the others, and the indictment had to be withdrawn. He later issued what was to have been his defense, in pamphlet form. It certainly contained evidence that the then government of England could stand a few reforms!

The trial centred Holcroft in the public eye and made him an object of hatred to the stand-patters, who, of course, were the most influential element in the theatre audience. The reception of his subsequent plays seems to have suffered accordingly. Even before the trial, *Love's Frailties* at Covent Garden early in 1794 met with a cool — even hostile — reception because of its "republican" sympathies. One of the obnoxious passages was a dialogue between a conceited coxcomb and the hero. "What profession were you bred to?" asks the

coxcomb, insultingly. "To the most useless, and often the most worthless of all professions," the hero replies, "that of a gentleman."

Plainly, the Constitution was in danger, and privilege quaked!

The Deserted Daughter, acted at Covent Garden in 1795, was a success, but increasing hostility developed with each new play — he seems to have written at least one a year — and he took refuge in France again, till the public should forget.

Before we leave him, the curious may care to go back to 1784, when *The Marriage of Figaro* was first produced in Paris. Holcroft — who had been in Paris the year before — at once resolved, on hearing of its success, to go over again and secure the text to translate, ahead of any rival. The comedy had not been printed, and he found it impossible to secure a manuscript copy, so carefully was the text guarded. Accordingly, he and a friend went to the theatre every night for over a week, both memorizing each evening a certain scene, and then rushing home to write it down and compare notes. They did not dare make any notes in the theatre, because, as Hazlitt naïvely remarks, if they had, "their design would probably have been suspected and defeated by the interference of the police."

As soon as the whole play was thus captured,

Holcroft rushed back to England, confided his secret to Harris of Covent Garden, and in a few weeks, under the title of *Follies of a Day*, Beaumarchais's masterpiece was acted in the English tongue. It was an instant and long-continued success. Hazlitt further records that the enterprising translator — and also adapter, for he made several changes — "received six hundred pounds for it at the theatre, besides a considerable sum for the copyright, which was bought at the time." The immorality of the whole transaction seems not to have troubled even Hazlitt.

And Beaumarchais? The Berne convention was still a century in the future!

Thomas Holcroft died in March 1809, in London, of a complication of diseases, among them the asthma of which he had been "cured" in childhood. He was sixty-three years old. One of his last expressed wishes was to see Godwin, whose hand he pressed, exclaiming, "My dear, dear friend!" He was still in financial difficulties at his death, in spite of all the plays, novels, songs, and books of travel he had written. Perhaps his lack of business acumen was an inheritance from his father; at any rate, it was characteristic of the player's temperament, and he had been a player all his early life. He had risen from humbleness and privation, self-taught, through the hard experience of the strolling players'

lot, to a position of some consequence in the literary world. His works, to be sure, have perished along with most of the drama of the period. But that is the fate of all work, in every period, save the greatest. His life remains as a vivid example of the intimate relation that exists in the practical theatre — not the theatre of textbook or closet, but the playhouse you and I pay our money to enter — between literature and privation, between the dignified and important and the trivial and mean, between the assured and conquering artist and the strolling player.

There is no school of the theatre but the theatre, and the theatre is wherever anybody gets up before a public and entertains them by "pretending."

SCENE II

The Jew That Shakespeare Drew

I HAVE often debated at what famous first-nights of the past I would most like to have been present in the audience. When Mozart rose and tapped his baton for silence and the overture to *Don Giovanni* began; when Sullivan tapped his baton and the first bubbles of the champagne that is *The Mikado* winked and sparkled; when the audience, with white, strained faces, departed from the first performance of *A Doll's House*, stunned by the reality of it, the elimination of pasteboard from the stage and the substitution of life; when Home's *Douglas* was produced, so that I might have heard the Scotchman cry, "Where's your Willie Shakespeare noo?"; when *Hamlet* was acted for the very first time in London (what would any of us not give if we could somehow savor that scene, and find out, at last, just what the Elizabethan stage and audience were like!); when Garrick acted *Richard III;* when a classic was born and *The School for Scandal* started on its career; when Sothern sprung *Dundreary* on an astonished audience — and his fellow players: — these are a few of the first nights I wish I could have attended. But more than any

of them, I think, I should choose that night of Feb. 14, 1741, when Charles Macklin appeared at Drury Lane as Shylock, and without any warning overthrew the traditions of almost half a century and established a new tradition which — with some modifications — has endured to this day. When you consider how slowly traditions change, especially in the theatre, Macklin's feat is one of the most extraordinary in the whole history of the stage.

The complete break with the past which followed the Restoration was more startling than any of us can realize from experiences known to us. The English theatre of Congreve and Dryden was utterly different from the theatre of Shakespeare and Jonson, different in tone and temper and technique, especially different in the character of its audiences. And in nothing is this more clearly shown than in the changes made in the plays of Shakespeare himself, which were quite too effective from the actor's standpoint to be abandoned entirely, yet too exalted and poetically simple in tragedy, and too pure and remote in comedy, to be presented as they were written. Half the dramatists of the Restoration took a hand at adapting them for the new age; but none worked quite the transformation which Lord Lansdowne performed with *The Merchant of Venice*. His version of that comedy, produced in 1701, converted Shylock into a comic character,

CHARLES MACKLIN AND JANE POPE
AS SHYLOCK AND PORTIA

From a contemporary print

played by Doggett, the low comedian of the London stage. To read any of these Restoration adaptations of Shakespeare is an even more melancholy task than reading the so-called Revised Version of the King James Bible, and we do not propose to quote one line from the Lansdowne monstrosity. It is sufficient to state that it was produced, that Doggett acted Shylock, quite evidently in a comic manner, and that the Lansdowne version and the comic Shylock held the boards exclusively for exactly forty years, or for a period equal to that which in our day has seen the drama change from *Hazel Kirke* to *Beyond the Horizon*, from *Shenandoah* to *Arms and the Man*. In fact, a rather astonishing thing about the Restoration and eighteenth-century stage in England was its static quality, its eternal repetitions year after year, so that *The School for Scandal* is recognizably kin to Cibber's *The Perplexed Husband*, after more than half a century. That is one reason why some of us cannot get up such passionate enthusiasm for the eighteenth century as characterizes the worshipers of Doctor Johnson. It appears to have been one of the most monotonous periods of all history. And I fly in the face of Providence and A. Edward Newton to assert that personally I find even Brother Boswell's a monotonous book.

At any rate, when in 1741 Charles Macklin,

whose real name was McLaughlin, which explains much, had the courage to propose to Fleetwood, manager of Drury Lane, a revival of Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, and the audacity to plan in his impersonation of Shylock a complete break with the Lansdowne-Restoration tradition, he became in my eyes something most admirable and stimulating. It is not quite certain why Macklin kept his intentions so carefully concealed from all the rest of the company at rehearsals, and consequently from the public. Probably he shrewdly estimated a greater success if he could spring a complete surprise; but probably, too, in the English theatre of 1741 the prospect of a departure from tradition would have thrown the company into a funk. Certain it is that he did keep his intentions concealed and at rehearsals merely walked through his part, repeating the lines without any expression, either vocal or facial. The other actors may be pardoned their annoyance at this, and their bewilderment and fear that the opening night would turn out a disaster. Nor were they reassured when the opening night came and Macklin strode through the greenroom on his way to have a peep at the house through a hole in the curtain. He was robed in a long black cloak, with a three-cornered red hat, and there was something in his aspect which must have made pretty Kitty Clive, who was to

play Portia, wonder if she had better, in the trial scene that night, give her usual imitations of well-known London attorneys.

His peep through the curtain satisfied him. The audience was large (Christopher Wren's theatre held two thousand people); the critics were there; and "fashion" was well represented. It was the sort of audience newspapers then, as now, described as brilliant. They knew, undoubtedly, that something unusual was about to happen. The air must have been electric with expectation. But what it was they had no inkling. Never again in his long life could Macklin have felt quite the tingle of opportunity he experienced that evening.

He was loudly applauded at his first entrance, and then the audience sat back to savor the new fare. They had not long to wait. Macklin's very intonations, as he uttered his opening speech, have been described by the German, Lichtenberg.

> The first words he utters are spoken slowly and deliberately: "Three thousand ducats." The *th* and the *s* twice occurring and the last *s* after the *t* have a lickerish sound, as if he were tasting the ducats and all that they can buy; this speech creates for the man, upon his first appearance, a prepossession which is sustained throughout.

Here certainly was no Doggett, no low comedian. Macklin relates that he heard from the audience

whispers of "Very good," "Very good indeed," and these sounds pleased him, so that as the opening scenes progressed he did not worry at the lack of applause. Rather he accepted the silent attention as a better tribute. Lichtenberg records that in the scene where Shylock misses his daughter, Macklin appeared —

> hatless, with hair all flying, some of it standing up straight a hand's breadth high, as if it had been lifted up by a breeze from the gallows. Both hands are doubled up, and his gestures are quick and convulsive. To see a man thus moved, who has been hitherto a calm, determined villain, is fearful.

So the play marched forward, with increasing approbation from the audience as their astonishment was forgotten in the emotions the actor roused, till in the trial scene Shylock stood before them a terrific embodiment of implacable revenge, a towering and tremendous figure of tragic evil. At the fall of the curtain the walls of Old Drury shook with applause. Macklin had triumphed; a tradition of forty years had been swept into the dust bin; a new tradition had been established; the audience that night had seen something which not one of them had ever seen before. Pope is reported to have said, a few nights later — or a few years later — that they had seen the Jew that Shakespeare drew. At any rate, they had seen something

whole worlds away from the Jew that Lansdowne drew.

Just what happened to the last Act of *The Merchant of Venice* on that memorable night, I have never been able to discover: doubtless what has happened to it on frequent occasions since. An Act which is soaked with more of the pure magic of poetry than any other passage of equal length in English literature — or, if you wish, any other passage in literature — goes by the board because a domineering Shylock has drained the audience of their emotions and their interest, and it drags superfluous, or is lopped off altogether. Macklin had enough to do, certainly, on that evening in 1741, without being asked to leave us an account of how the last Act was handled. The audience may be pardoned, in their excitement at discovering tragic greatness in what they had supposed was a stupid and rather vulgar comedy rôle, if they left no account, either, of the sweet, moonlit emergence of the play into romantic happiness — or no complaint if it was not accomplished.

Pope, in saying "This is the Jew that Shakespeare drew," was merely being Pope-ish. Pope knew no more about Shakespeare than he knew about Homer. But there have been a few skeptics in all ages, since Macklin fixed the new tradition on our theatre: men who cannot get that last Act

out of their minds, and who wonder if, after all, this indeed was the Jew that Shakespeare drew; if, after all, Macklin did not banish one false ideal for another, a far more dignified and moving one, to be sure.

Not, of course, that every actor since Macklin has played Shylock as he did; there have been many famous interpreters of the part who might seem to differ widely. Edmund Kean, for example, who first acted the rôle in London in 1813, was far less malignant and roused more sympathy. Henry Irving, as many of us remember, was almost the prophet and spokesman of an oppressed race, towering intellectually above the Venetian curs who barked at his heels, and inspiring at his fall the full compassion which we all feel — in the theatre — when something great is overthrown. But all actors since Macklin have, none the less, played Shylock in the grand manner, have made him a large, tragic figure, dominating the play — all except David Warfield.

It is no part of my purpose to indulge in "scholarship," even were I able to do so. Nor do I think that in the long run scholarship — a minute study of the origins of the plot, the sources of Shakespeare's material, and all the rest — throws much light on the problem. A book has recently been issued, called *Shaking the Dust from Shakespeare*,

EDMUND KEAN AS SHYLOCK

by Harris Jay Griston, of the New York bar, in which he argues that *The Merchant of Venice* was never intended as an Italian play at all, but a Roman play. Venice was the district of Veniti, in the fourth century A.D., and the penalty of a pound of flesh was but the perfectly legal and rather commonplace result of the Twelve Tables of Roman law. Mr. Griston, I think, is suffering from a widespread malady, a compelling desire to make the plots of Shakespeare square with the probabilities, which modern art has taught us to regard as sacred. It cannot be done — chiefly because Shakespeare himself made no effort to do it. He did n't even know it was necessary. By any modern standards, he had no historic sense and no understanding of realism. At some time, far off, across the Alps, it was the law to allow creditors to collect the flesh of their insolvent debtors — a cruel law, which deserved to be set aside by just such an illegal trick as Portia's, but which was after all not so very much worse than some laws known to Elizabethan Englishmen. At any rate it made excellent material for a stirring situation in a play, and not a soul in the audience was going to bother his head about the historical accuracy of it. The romantic Venice of pomp and power, who sat proudly on her islands and sent her freighted argosies around the Seven Seas, made

a rich, golden setting, an atmosphere suited to the play. If Mr. Griston thinks that the comedy would not lose more than it gained by being shoved back into the Roman world, he is but a poor critic of æsthetic matters. Besides, why should we strain at the pound of flesh, at Portia's disguise, and her childish and illegal trickery, while swallowing the ghost of Hamlet's father, and the witches of Macbeth, and Rosalind, and Viola? Professor Brander Matthews has somewhere commented on the utter ridiculousness of the plot of *The Merchant of Venice*. But what of it? That is little more than to say Shakespeare was not Ibsen, and story-telling in Elizabeth's England was not what it is to-day.

Yet Shakespeare has survived. He knew well what he was about, and could make the most implausible plot march triumphant because he had the supreme gift of characterization — by far the most important gift the fairies can bring to a dramatist's cradle — and the ability to create poetic and atmospheric unity in a work of art, elfin and tender as in *The Tempest*, brooding and tragic as in *Hamlet*, which is sometimes worth more emotionally than a wilderness of probabilities. All his plays ask of the interpreters in any age is a performance which characterizes humanly and treats the story with the respect its author did. The rest will take care of itself, even the improbabilities. Nobody at a good

WALTER HAMPDEN AS SHYLOCK

Photograph by Floyd, New York

performance of *Hamlet* ever paused to admonish himself that he did n't believe in ghosts, to argue about the matter, like the ghost of the professor who appeared to Heine with a bunch of grave-worms in his vest pocket in place of a watch. Nor is one greatly troubled at *The Merchant* by speculations concerning the exact period when the Twelve Tables ceased to be law, or by the extraordinary effectiveness of Portia's disguise. After all, stranger things happen in the modern drama — almost every night, in fact, about five minutes before the fall of the final curtain, when the dramatist realizes he must hurry and get his characters out of their predicaments, if he is going to send the suburbs home happy and collect any considerable royalties.

Since Shakespeare knew his business as a dramatist, and infrequently put anything into his plays without a sound reason, we may well ask why he put an entire last Act into a play which — if acted in the Macklin tradition — is all over before that Act begins. Is it not perhaps possible that *The Merchant of Venice* was called "The Merchant of Venice" because it is about the Merchant of Venice, and not about Shylock? Jews in Shakespeare's day were certainly considered fair game for ridicule and abuse, and it would hardly have occurred to an Elizabethan audience to pity one of them, even in

a play. The Jew Shylock was an excellent villain to bring about the needed dramatic suspense in this romantic comedy. That Shakespeare had any idea his Jew was to be made — or could be made — a tragic figure, a symbol of the perversion and persecution of a race, is highly doubtful, to say the least. It was never intended that he should so fill the minds and hearts of the spectators that the play was over when he left the scene. Perhaps it is Shakespeare's fault that he does this, as most actors play him. Being the tool of his own creative faculty when characterization was concerned, Shakespeare could not help making Shylock a vivid human being, and the longer he was on the stage, the more human, the more vital, he grew. It is difficult, if not impossible to-day, to read *The Merchant of Venice* without feeling Shylock as the intellectual superior of every other character. Still, that does not alter the fact that in Shakespeare's scheme and in the minds of Shakespeare's audiences he was, however human, of an inferior caste, over whom one would waste no sympathy as he was thwarted in his revenge — from whom one would pass on to the moonlit serenity of the final act, when his social and racial superiors, whom he had made to suffer for a while, were happily united.

When Mr. Griston in his recent book points out that David Warfield was really on the track of the

David Warfield's Shylock

Jew that Shakespeare drew, I am inclined to listen to him. Warfield certainly did not play Shylock in the grand manner. He seemed to be reaching for an impersonation which was quietly, almost realistically human; to be depicting a humble Hebrew drawn into the plot naturally, in the course of business, goaded by insult and oppression into attempting the literal fulfillment of his bond, and passing out of the story a pathetic figure — to modern eyes — but not so great and tragic a one that the balance of the play need be destroyed. The trouble was, of course, the Belasco production was so stupid in almost every respect, from the cuts and transpositions of the text to the pasteboard unreality and tiresome tinsel of the investiture and the hopeless artificiality of the other actors — with two honorable exceptions — that not a soul in any audience ever had a chance to guess what Warfield was about. It is interesting, but useless, to speculate what would have happened if Warfield could have played Shylock under the guidance of an imaginative director, who would have keyed the whole production to his humble, realistically human impersonation, letting him be the not too tragic villain of a golden romance. In spite of everything, there would have been pity for him. That is impossible to escape in these latter years. But it might, perhaps, have been closer to

the Jew that Shakespeare drew than anything our stage has seen since the Puritans closed the theatre, closer at any rate because, while keeping Shylock human, it also kept him in his place.

That is another first night at which I wish I had been present. The pity is that nobody was, nor ever will be.

SCENE III

The Theatre and the Frontier

There is no book of theatrical history and reminiscence in my library, I think, which I have read so often or with so much interest as one entitled: *Theatrical Management in the West and South for Thirty Years. Interspersed with anecdotal sketches: autobiographically given by Sol Smith, retired actor.* It was an expansion of two previous volumes by the same author, and was published by Harper and Brothers in 1868, characteristically dedicated by the author to "Henry Marsh, Esq., the best decipherer of obscure, interlineated, and interpolated manuscript I have ever met with."

Sol Smith, like Thomas Holcroft before him, came from humble origins; he too was largely self-educated; he was a strolling player and endured many hardships; in his earlier years he was perpetually, and later frequently, in debt. But yet how different his story! Old Sol, as he came to be known, was a typical Yankee product of a new country, a pioneer country. Audacious and irrepressible in humor, resilient as a new tire, never stumped for lack of an idea and resources to carry it out, his story, as he tells it, has an unstudied

vividness and an historical interest to me endlessly fascinating. I see his frontier theatres more plainly than I see Colley Cibber's Drury Lane. I even fancy I should to-day enjoy his comic performances, crude as they perhaps were, more than I should enjoy the robust acting of Forrest or even the more tempered art of Macready, with both of whom he was at times associated.

The frontier theatre has vanished now with the vanishing of the frontier, and even the small-town theatre has succumbed to the movies. So too has vanished the type of Yankee actor-manager represented by Sol Smith. Our theatres are centrally controlled from New York, by men of another race and stamp. Old Sol's story, especially when read with other books of the time as commentary, is an alluring — and a closed — chapter in American history, and one which blessedly differs from the chapters we are forced to read during the process playfully called "education"; wars and politics have no part in it, except the teacup strifes of temperaments; but we see our forbears at their amusements, which, as everybody comes in time to learn, are the important things of life.

Solomon Smith's father had been volunteer fifer at the battle of Bunker Hill, at the age of thirteen or fourteen. At the close of the war he received a tract of "military land" in Oswego County in

New York, then almost a wilderness. Solomon was born there in 1801, in a log cabin. He had six brothers for playmates, named Josiah, Silas, Oliver, Holland, Cicero, and Martin. There was a seventh who had gone to sea on the Constitution. That brother, named Wright, saved all his grog-money and retired after the Tripoli war and set up a store in Charlestown, Massachusetts. In due course, after Solomon's arrival, came three more boys. They all appear to have been set early to work, and presently forced, like kittens, to fend for themselves. Sol was "put out" to a farmer, for four years, at the tender age of eight! He records that at twelve he could take a yoke of oxen into the woods in the dead of winter, fell and cut up trees, and snake them back to the farm.

Meanwhile several of the older brothers had followed Wright to Boston, where they too had set up stores, and whither their mother had gone to join them. Little Sol was filled with a great desire to see his mother again, so before he had reached his thirteenth birthday, with five dollars in his pocket he set out alone to walk the three hundred miles that intervened! Poor little chap — when he finally reached the house of an uncle in Pelham, Massachusetts, it was to learn that his mother was dead. But he kept stoutly on, eventually got to his destination, and went to work in one of the stores,

on Ann Street. He records his participation in an attempt of the Republican Boys to "tear down the State House" because the Federalists had illuminated it in honor of the downfall of Napoleon; and his year was further enlivened by the following incident: —

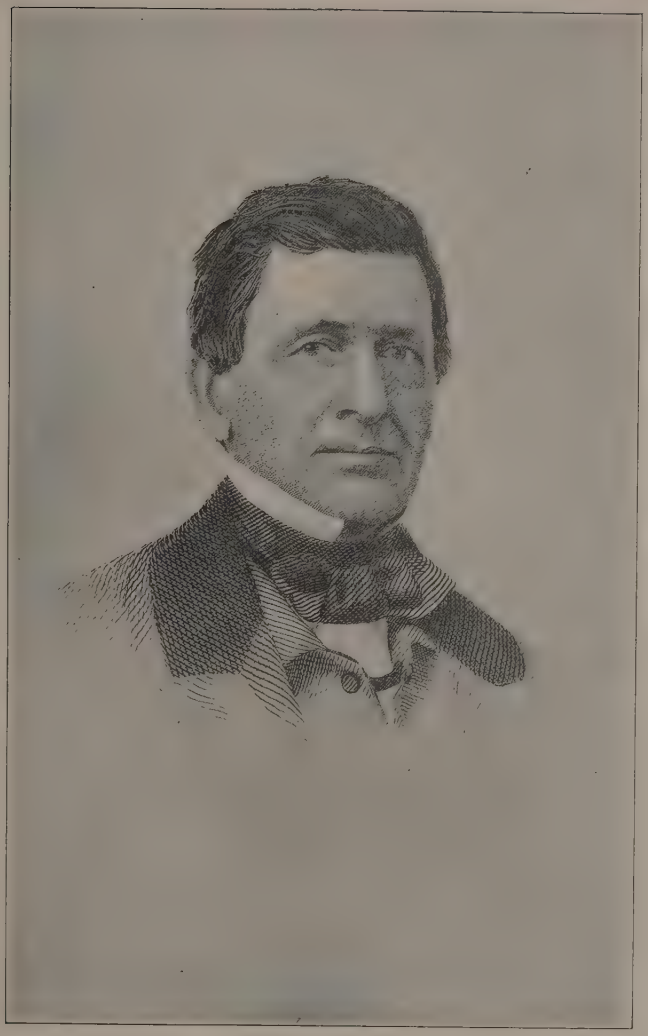
One Sunday in that summer (1814) news came that the Constitution frigate — "Old Ironsides" — was chased by two frigates and a seventy-four into Marblehead. This being the vessel in which my brother had served five years (*and* saved his grog), and moreover being a general favorite with the whole people, there was a great stir when the news was spread of her danger. Without saying a word to anyone but my brother Sam, who happened to be with me in our cellar in Wharf Street, I placed a large club in the hands of that patriotic youth, seized an old musket which was rusting in a closet under the stairs in the hall, which musket was destitute of any lock or ramrod, and saying "Follow me!" rushed forth into the streets, closely followed by brother Sam, and we pushed for Marblehead, to afford what little aid we could to the noble old Constitution. We ran at great speed through Broad Street, across State Street, down Flagg Alley, passing Faneuil Hall with all its great memories, through Ann and Prince Streets, to Charlestown Bridge, which we half crossed, when we met some acquaintances, who, after learning our patriotic intentions, informed us that the Constitution was safe and our assistance was not needed. We sneaked back to Wharf Street, our ardor having abated, and deposited our arms in the back cellar.

On the following Sunday the buildings on Long and India wharves were crowded with people to see the gallant Old Ironsides sail majestically into the harbor, and to send up cheers of joy for her safety, which cheers were answered by the glorious crew, who, under Hull and Bainbridge, had a short time previously captured the Guerrière and sunk the Java.

In the autumn of that year the brothers moved to Albany, taking little Sol along, where he clerked in their stores and read Shakespeare. Up to this time he had never entered a theatre, but in Albany there was a theatre on Green Street, managed by John Bernard, one of that band of English players who came to America in the early years of the republic and accomplished so much in giving our infant stage a standard and a link with tradition. He had appeared at home at Covent Garden; his American début was made at the Greenwich Street Theatre, New York, in 1797, as Goldfinch in our friend Holcroft's play, *The Road to Ruin*. In 1806 he managed a theatre in Boston. But as a manager he seems not to have been a success, for he returned to England some time after the Albany venture, and died in 1828 "in destitute circumstances." His Albany company, at the time little Sol came to that city, was far from a poor one, including as it did the Drakes, Bernard himself, and Henry Placide, then only a lad of sixteen, to be sure. Henry and

his younger brother, Tom Placide, were the sons of an English tight-rope dancer and pantomimist who had come to America in 1801. Both became famous on our stage, and Harry was highly praised by so competent a judge as the English actor, George Vanderhoff, for his careful naturalism and his comic gifts. The first performance by this Albany company which Sol saw was O'Keefe's comic opera, *The Highland Reel.* "The impression made upon my youthful mind was strong and lasting," he records, "and I remember the airs of that opera to this day. My head was full of acting from that time forward; my duties at the store became irksome to me; in brief, I became as thousands had become before me, and thousands will become after me — stage mad!"

His brothers refused him permission to visit the theatre again, so he struck up acquaintance with the Drakes and got in free behind the scenes, letting himself down from his bedroom window by a sheet-rope and returning the same way. All went well till one night he "blacked up" and went on as a super in *Three-Fingered Jack*, and forgot to wash his face thereafter. He overslept the next morning and a servant, sent to rouse him, ran screaming back to the family with the information that there was "a nigger in Sol's bed." He visited the theatre no more that winter.



SOL SMITH

Engraved by Jackman from a daguerreotype by Burney

The next season there was a new company and no chance of free admission. Always fertile in resource, he now managed to sneak into the fly lofts and at least hear what went on. On a night when *Richard III* was announced, he sneaked in at six and hid in a large box, from which he emerged to hear the play. Presently stage hands drew near, and he popped back into his hiding-place, only to be lifted up and carried on the stage, as the defunct Henry VI. His statement that he was much tumbled about when the procession had passed off, R.U.E., forcing him to lift the lid and cry out, is doubtless correct. His further statement, that the bearers were so terrified that all of them fled the theatre and one of them turned preacher, may be taken for what it is worth.

The next season (1816–17) was evidently rather disastrous for the management, and ended in a row and the breakup of the company, some of whom moved on to Troy. Sol meanwhile had learned the rôle of young Norval, and off to Troy he posted after them, "not doubting for an instant that I would be received with open arms by actors and manager." Alas for his hopes! The actors wanted money, not an addition to their number; and there was no money. The boy of sixteen found himself stranded, penniless, not daring to go back to his brothers. Accordingly he walked to Saratoga,

and thence west to his old home in Solon, earning what he could at odd jobs by the way. Here he heard from his brothers, who had forgiven him. But the Western urge was on the family: one brother was about to leave for Ohio to try his fortunes, and arranged with little Sol to meet him in a month at the starting-point of the journey. Mails, however, were uncertain in those days on the frontier, and the brother was delayed without getting word to the boy, who, thinking he had missed connections, purchased a skiff at Olean Point and set out all alone to row and float down the Allegheny River to Pittsburgh. At Pittsburgh he took the last of his money to pay his tavern bill — and buy a seat for the theatre!

The play was *The Lady of the Lake.* He tried to get a job with the company the next morning but failed, and so took passage on a flatboat to work his way to Marietta, where he searched all the surrounding country for his missing brother, living, he declares, on apples and peaches, and sleeping in barns. Finally the brother came along with others of the family, Sol joined them in their "ark," and they all moved on to Cincinnati, down the river. Ten of the brothers eventually arrived there, and were known as the "sixty-feet Smiths," as each one was six feet tall.

Young Sol soon wandered on to Louisville,

apprenticed himself to a printer, and went to the theatre, where he found his Albany friends, the Drakes, in the company. As soon, however, as this company left the city, he became, as he says, "at once dissatisfied with the printing business," and set off on foot — again westward! Eventually he reached Vincennes, Indiana, where he had hoped to find a theatre in operation. There was none, so he hoed corn for twenty-five cents a day and then got a job on the *Western Sun* as an apprentice. In Vincennes he joined a Thespian Society, and became the low comedian of the group. This diversion lasted for a winter, but when the society broke up, Sol was at his wanderings again. He and another apprentice ran away and footed it to Nashville. Alas! the Nashville troupe had just gone on to St. Louis, and St. Louis was a long way off; so again he settled down to the printing business — for a month. At the end of a month he trudged the three hundred miles back to Cincinnati, to see his brothers again.

He thus records his winter activities after his return — remember it is a boy of nineteen, in what was little removed from a frontier town, who thus spent his time: —

> At Cincinnati, among my numerous relations and friends, I spent a happy winter. The evenings were delightful; singing meetings, debating societies, religious

gatherings, oratorios, family parties, and politics served to fill up my time rather agreeably; added to which, I attended a series of law lectures, performed the duties of clerk in one of my brothers' stores, on a salary of eight dollars per month, and played the organ in the New Jerusalem church three times every Sunday, and every Thursday evening, besides teaching a whole lot of young new Jerusalemites the art of psalmody two evenings each week.

Toward spring, finding I had a little time to spare, I joined a Thespian Society, who held their meetings in a building belonging to Elmore Williams, in upper Market Street. I was the hero of the corps, and enacted Young Norval. A Mr. Sweeney — afterward justice of the peace — was Lady Randolph, and he acted the character very well, considering that his voice was decidedly a baritone, and he had not shaved for a week! The "meditating maid," Anna, was personated by Mr. George Row, a tall lank carpenter, who chewed tobacco and was obliged to turn aside every now and then to spit. Glenalvon, Mr. Davis, who afterward attached himself to the stage, but with no success. Of all the members of that society, I know of but one — leaving myself out of the count for others to judge of — who did not go to the devil! And it may not be improper here for me to say a word or two on the subject of amateur theatricals.

I never knew any good to come from Thespian societies; and I have known them to be productive of much harm. Performing a character with success — and Thespians are always successful — inevitably begets in the performer a desire for an enlarged sphere of action.

If he can please his townsmen and friends, why should he not delight a metropolitan audience? He becomes dissatisfied with his profession or business, whatever it may be, applies to a manager for a first appearance in a regular theatre — appears — fails — takes to drink, and is ruined. Then to see the inordinate vanity of those amateurs who occasionally volunteer for some charitable purpose: the airs of consequence they give themselves; the ignorance they betray of a profession which they degrade by adopting even for a single night; the consummate impudence with which they strut before the public in the highest characters; not a shadow of fright about them — oh no! Their friends are in the house to applaud them whether they deserve applause or not. Their success is not doubtful; the thing is settled; they must succeed; and they generally do, for applause is bountifully and indiscriminately showered upon them; and they are, in their own minds, immensely great actors before they have the slightest knowledge of the first rudiments of the profession.

That winter (1820) a new theatre was built in Cincinnati — the Columbia Street Theatre — and opened by Messrs. Collins and Jones, who were actors as well as managers. With the closing of the theatre in the spring Sol's wanderlust again came on him, and he set out once more for Vincennes, where he fell back on his knowledge of printing. However, his friends the Drakes came along with a very small company to give a summer season, and the temptation to join them was not to be resisted.

The company thus consisted, he records, of "Messrs. A. Drake, S. Drake Jr., Palmer, Fisher, Douglas, Jones, Sol Smith, and Mesdames Mongin, Fisher, and three or four little female Fishers." Douglas was presently drowned while bathing in the Wabash, but that did not prevent the little band from enacting *Pizarro*, with its eighteen parts. The method they employed is entertainingly set forth by Sol.

Thus Sam Drake, (as Pizarro), after planning an attack on the unoffending Peruvians while engaged in worship "at their ungodly altars," and assigning his generals (me) their "several posts," in the next Act is seen (as Ataliba) leading the Indian warriors to battle, declaring that "straight forward will he march until he sees his people free, or they behold their monarch fall!" He is victorious, and goes to offer up thanks to the gods therefor — when, presto! on comes the same man again (as Pizarro), smarting under the stings of defeat!

Fisher (as Las Casas) calls down a curse on the heads of the Spaniards, throws off his cloak, drops his cross, doffs his gray wig, and appears in the next scene as the gallant Rolla, inciting his "brave associates" to deeds of valor! Alexander Drake, as Orozembo, in the first scene gives an excellent character of the youth Alonzo, pronouncing him to be a "nation's benefactor"; he is stuck under the fifth rib by a Spanish soldier (that's me again) and is carried off by his murderer; he then slips off his shirt and skullcap, claps on a touch of red paint, and behold, in the next scene, he is the blooming Alonzo,

and is engaged in a quiet tête-à-tête with his Indian spouse!

For my own part, I was the Spanish army entire! but my services were not confined to that party. Betweenwhile I had to officiate as High Priest of the Sun; then lose both of my eyes, and feel my way, guided by a little boy, through the heat of the battle, to tell the audience what was going on behind the scenes; afterward, my sight being restored and my black cloak dropped, I was placed as a sentinel over Alonzo. Besides, I was obliged to find the sleeping child, fight a blow or two with Rolla, fire off three guns at him while crossing the bridge, beat the alarm drum, and do at least two thirds of the shouting! Some may think my situation was no sinecure; but, being a novice, all my exertions were nothing in comparison with those of the Drakes, particularly Sam, who frequently played two or three parts in one play, and after being killed in the last scene, was obliged to fall far enough off the stage to play slow music as the curtain descended!

Our stage was ten feet wide and eight feet deep. When we played pieces that required bridges and mountains, we had not much room to spare; indeed, I might say, we were somewhat crowded.

At the end of an eight-week season the company departed for Louisville, but Sol trudged back to Cincinnati, fearing to risk the wrath of his brothers if he remained permanently a Thespian. In Cincinnati he determined to study law, and was taken into a justice's office. He stuck it out for a year,

but when Collins and Jones reopened their theatre in the winter of 1821–22 he applied for the post of prompter and was engaged. It was during this season that Cooper played an engagement, enlivened by an amusing incident which illustrates the naïve conditions under which even the most eminent actors then labored.

Thomas Cooper was undoubtedly a skilled actor, with something more than a spark of genius. Born in England in 1776, he was for four years a ward of Godwin, who supervised his education; and it was through Godwin's friend, Holcroft, that he secured his first stage engagement, with Stephen Kemble in Edinburgh. He acted Hamlet, Macbeth, and other parts at Covent Garden before he was twenty, and in 1796 came to America, where, except for two professional visits to England, his life was passed. In later years he was surveyor of the ports of Philadelphia and New York, and died at Bristol, Pennsylvania, in 1849.

Cooper brought to America a first-hand observation of the acting of Kemble, Cooke, and Mrs. Siddons, and a reverence for the classic repertoire. He not only won great fame on our shores, but was a steadying influence in the theatre, and his playing was a school for our young native actors, to whom he directly passed the torch of tradition. His most famous characters seem to have been Mark Antony,

THOMAS COOPER AS HAMLET

Engraved by Edwin

Virginius, Damon, and Macbeth, but in the course of his career he acted one hundred and sixty-four parts. He was a man of fine aristocratic presence, with beautiful dark eyes and a voice of uncommon power, "with tones of peculiar silvery sweetness." His home at one time was on the northeast corner of Broadway and Leonard Street, New York, next to that of Stephen Price, for thirty years manager of the Park Theatre, the American Old Drury.

It was this actor who crossed the Alleghanies in 1822, to act in Cincinnati.

On the first night of his engagement the following whimsical incident occurred: *Othello* was the play: —

The fame of the great tragedian had drawn a crowded audience, composed of every description of persons, and among the rest a country lass of sixteen, whom — not knowing her real name — we will call Peggy. Peggy had never before seen the inside of a playhouse. She entered at the time Othello was making his defense before the Duke and senators. The audience were unusually attentive to the play, and Peggy was permitted to walk in the lobby until she arrived at the door of the stage box, when a gentleman handed her in, without withdrawing his eyes from the celebrated performer, and her beau, a country boy, was obliged to remain in the lobby. Miss Peggy stared about for a moment, as if doubting whether she was in her proper place, till, casting her eyes on the stage, she observed several chairs unoccupied. It is probable this circumstance alone would not have induced her to take the step she

did, but she observed the people on the stage appeared more at their ease than those among whom she was standing, and, withal, much more sociable; and, as Fate would have it, just at the moment, Othello, looking nearly toward the place where she was situated, exclaimed,

Here comes the lady!

The senators half rose, in expectation of seeing the gentle Desdemona, when lo! the maiden from the country stepped from the box plump on the stage, and advanced toward the expecting Moor! It is impossible to give any idea of the confusion that followed. The audience clapped and cheered — the Duke and senators forgot their dignity — the girl was ready to sink with consternation — even Cooper himself could not help joining in the general mirth. The uproar lasted for several minutes, until the gentleman who had handed her into the box helped the blushing girl out of her unpleasant situation. It was agreed by all present that a lady never made her début on any stage with more éclat than Miss Peggy.

At the close of the season Sol once again withdrew from the theatre, and got married to Miss Martha Thérèse Mathews, daughter of a music teacher. She herself sang in the local Haydn Society, of which Smith too was a member. When he got married, Sol records, he possessed exactly $4.62, which he promptly handed to the minister. After a month at the house of one of his brothers, he cast about for means of a livelihood and decided

a new paper was much needed in Cincinnati. He set up and printed an announcement of the *Independent Press*, and then took it out on Main Street and obtained ninety subscribers. The next morning he bought two hundred dollars' worth of type on credit, and trundled it to a printing shop in a wheelbarrow (borrowed). Here he arranged terms with the printer, and immediately pulled off his coat and began setting type.

He got out the first issue on July 4, 1822, and two hundred and ten new subscriptions followed on the first day. Presently he had seven hundred. He remarks: —

> I shall say little about this paper. It carried considerable influence with it. I can only say I was honest in my editorial course, and I believe at this day all who were opposed to the establishment will admit that my intentions were good. There was a series of letters published during the first six months which caused great excitement, inasmuch as they bore heavily — under fictitious names — on some of the oldest inhabitants, exposing many transactions for years supposed to have been forgotten. I was threatened with all sorts of punishments and was several times attacked by persons who thought themselves aggrieved, but somehow or other always happened to come off with unbroken bones and a whole skin.

He does, however, record a fight he had — because of one of his articles — with a man twice his

weight. He was so frightened, he says, that he did n't let the man hit him, knocking him down each time he tried to. That alone saved his hide. It seems like an excellent method.

His was the first paper to "raise the standard of General Jackson in Ohio."

Late in 1823 Collins and Jones reopened the theatre. Here is an interesting item from his reminiscences: —

> The opening play was *The Soldier's Daughter*, the part of Young Malfort by Mr. Edwin Forrest. Being editor of a paper, I was, of course, and ex-officio, a judge of theatrical matters; but when I gave a very favorable opinion of Forrest's acting in the comparatively trifling character of Malfort my brother editors laughed at me — and afterward, when he played *Richard* for his benefit and I prophesied his future greatness, they set me down as little less than a madman. They said I would "spoil the lad" — he was a clever boy, certainly, but puffing would ruin him. Mr. Pelby acted as a star during this season, as did Mr. Pemberton, Forrest playing Titus and Icilius to their Brutus and Virginius.

Edwin Forrest, who was destined to occupy so commanding a position on our stage, was born in Philadelphia in 1806. He first began to act professionally in 1820, and was but a lad of seventeen when the Cincinnati editor of twenty-two so unerringly picked out his promise. An actor of seven-

teen, a newspaper editor — also proprietor, compositor, reporter, and critic — of twenty-two! How strange it sounds to the present generation, when a boy of seventeen is still at prep school, thinking of football, and a youth of twenty-two is but getting out of college! Doubtless it was the frontier — a good school, if a hard one.

Sol continues his account with further anecdotes of Forrest.

In the summer the company proceeded to Louisville; but a party of them soon returned and opened the Globe Theatre on Main Street. This party consisted of Messrs. Forrest, Scott, Cargill, Woodruff, and Davis; Mrs. Riddle, Miss Riddle, Mrs. Cargill, and Mrs. Hanna. At this house Forrest played Othello and many other characters for the first time, but with scarcely any knowledge of the text, his taste generally leading him to prefer the low comedy characters! I recollect seeing him play Blaise and Lubin — and very well he played them too. Finding he was trifling away his time, I advised him to write to New Orleans for an engagement, which he did, and closed with Mr. Caldwell for the ensuing winter season, at a salary of eighteen dollars per week.

My brother Martin wrote a petit comedy for the Globe Theatre, entitled *Modern Fashions*, which was quite successful, Forrest and Scott playing a pair of dandies in it. I wrote a sort of a farce called *The Tailor in Distress*, in which a well-known merchant tailor in Main Street figured as the hero, and in which Forrest

performed the part of a negro. Business being bad, and believing our two pieces played together might produce the expenses, I engaged the house for one night, agreeing to pay each performer the sum of two dollars. Thus Edwin Forrest acted a dandy in the first piece, a negro in the second, and Sancho Panza in the concluding pantomime, all for the sum of two dollars!

It is generally believed that this appearance of Forrest's in black face was the first use made on our stage of native negro character for dramatic purposes.

Business failing altogether in the Globe Theatre, the members of the company scattered in different directions. Forrest and Davis, with the Riddle family, made an excursion into the country and performed in the small towns of Ohio with no success. At Lebanon, or Dayton, Forrest was obliged to pledge a trunk of stage wardrobe for his bill at a boarding-house or tavern; and whether he has yet recovered it I am unadvised. One day the party traveled on foot from Lebanon to Cincinnati, — twenty-two miles, — crossed the river to Newport, and played *Douglas* and *Miss in Her Teens* to a house of seven dollars! They contrived to get through the summer, and in the fall they all joined Collins and Jones at Lexington, in Kentucky.

When I had published seventy-two numbers of the *Press* I began to find carrying on a newspaper without capital was a bad business. My notes fell due; subscribers were delinquent; I could not live on politics; and I sold out. The *Press* was merged in the *National Repub-*

lican, which became a firm supporter of Andrew Jackson for the presidency, as my paper had been. Elijah Hayward, who succeeded me in the chair editorial, on the accession of General Jackson in 1828 was appointed Commissioner of the General Land Office. My last words to the readers of the *Independent Press* were: "Live honestly, serve God, and take the newspapers."

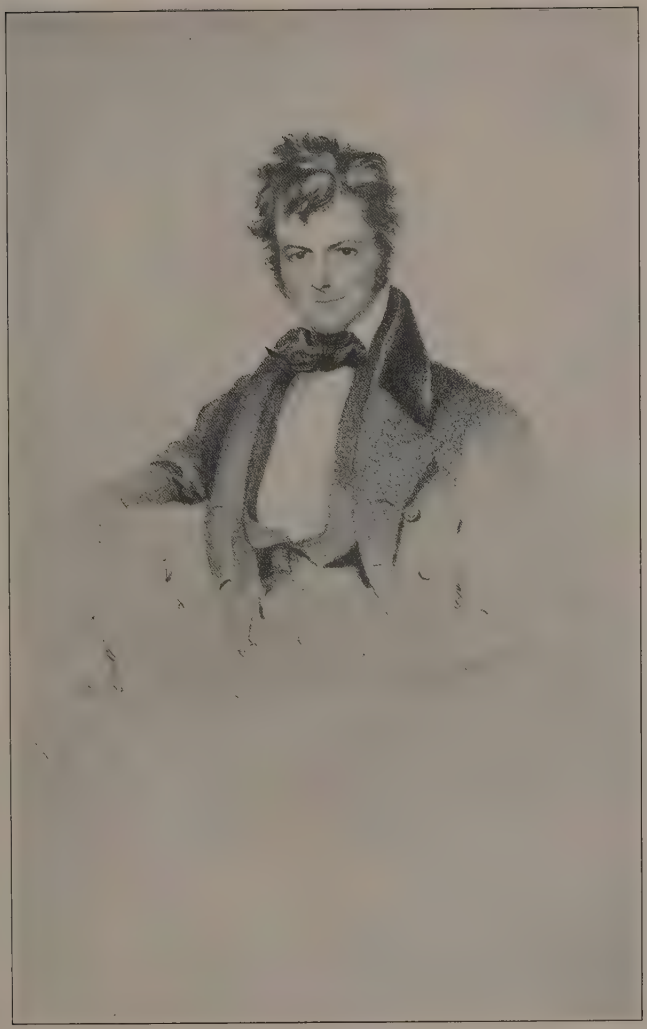
After his paper was sold, Sol made a trip into Kentucky to try to collect a few subscriptions and found his friend Drake playing at Frankfort. Somebody suggested that Smith become a manager and take a company back to Cincinnati. Of course, he "had never dreamed of such a thing" — as if he had ever really dreamed of anything else! — but he yielded, after playing one night in Lexington, with Forrest and others. Forrest wanted to go back to Cincinnati with him.

But as he was under a previous contract with Mr. Caldwell at New Orleans, I consulted his interests rather than my own, and refused to receive him. In vain he urged that he could easily compromise with the Southern manager, and that he would rather be with me at ten dollars per week than with a stranger at more than twice the salary; all would not do. I was steadfast in my refusal. In a pet with me, he went to the Circus, and made an engagement with the proprietors to go with them as a rider and a tumbler for a year! I heard of this arrangement just as I was about to leave Lexington, and my mortification was great. I called in at the Circus

and, sure enough, there was Ned in all his glory, surrounded by riders, tumblers, and grooms. He was a little abashed at seeing me, but putting a good face on the matter, he said he had made up his mind not to go to New Orleans, and having been refused an engagement at ten dollars a week by me, he had engaged "with these boys" at twelve. To convince me of his ability to sustain his new line of business, he turned a couple of flip-flaps on the spot. I asked him to walk with me to my lodgings, where by dint of hard lecturing and strong argument I prevailed on him to abandon his new profession and commence his journey to New Orleans immediately.

Forrest had been a puny lad, but at fourteen he began to grow, and by now, no doubt, had attained some of that robust stature and that tremendous strength and animal spirits which were so prominent in later years. He would probably have made a capital circus performer — or a prize fighter, for that matter.

Sol went back to Cincinnati with his troupe, in which he himself and also his younger brother Lemuel acted, and ended the season eleven hundred dollars in debt. Accordingly he betook himself, and those of his troupe who stuck by him, eastward, arriving after a time at Pittsburgh. Here they gave, he declares, excellent performances but to poor houses. His creditors grew so numerous that when his benefit night came, the street before the theatre



Edwin Forrest

was packed with them, all armed with free passes, determined to get at least some amusement for their pay. There were also constables in the house, waiting to arrest the manager who was playing the Doctor in *Animal Magnetism* — an odd analogy to Holcroft's career as a stroller — as soon as the curtain was rung down. Accordingly, Sol had himself lowered through a trap into the cellar, and his brother told the sheriffs he had jumped the back fence. When the officers had departed in pursuit, he emerged, still in costume, and fled to a friend's house where he remained concealed till it was time to take the Philadelphia stage.

He and his wife paid their expenses to Philadelphia by giving concerts. On their arrival, he at once applied for a place at the Chestnut Street Theatre, managed by Wood and including in its company the father and mother of Joseph Jefferson and the father of William Warren. The long lanky young actor out of the frontier West found no position awaiting him in this, perhaps the best theatre in America at this time. He did, however, find work at a resort for summer amusements, called Vauxhall Garden, where the actors were paid in checks reading: "Good at the Bar for one Drink." This did n't help much in the support of his family, so he hired a Jersey wagon — on credit — and took his wife to Princeton to give a concert. The account

of this concert reflects so genial a light on the Princeton undergraduates of those days that it should not be omitted.

A notice was written and posted up about the college yard, announcing that "Mr. and Mrs. Smith, from Philadelphia, would give a vocal concert" on such a night, "to consist of a great variety of songs and duets, sentimental and comic." I had but nine cents remaining of my five dollars, and with this sum I purchased oil sufficient to set a large lamp burning in the centre of a school room which I had rented for the proposed concert. I engaged boys to bring some additional benches from a neighboring church, promising them payment for their trouble in the evening. Having lighted my lamp about sundown, I waited for nearly an hour, doubtful whether a single individual would honor my concert by attending. Just as I was about shutting up the room in despair, one young gentleman came to the door, handed me half a dollar, and walked in. "What! nobody here yet?" "Not yet." "Any tickets sold?" "Don't know — probably — left some for sale at the hotel." "Never mind — I'll go and rouse up the boys"; and off he went. I called a lad who was loitering about the door and dispatched him with the half dollar to purchase candles.

The room lit up, I began to be haunted by misgivings that we should have no audience, and that I should be required to refund the half dollar to the young man who had gone to rouse the boys. I was soon relieved from my suspense, however, for the young collegian returned with a dozen of his fellow students.

Seeing I had no doorkeeper, my first customer proposed to take that office, advising me to go and prepare myself for the performance, as the house would soon be full. Most readily accepting his services, I retired into the little closet set apart for our dressing-room, where my wife was awaiting my coming with trembling anxiety. Soon I heard a great stir in the room — moving of benches, rustling of silk, opening of windows, and all the indications of people gathering. At length our volunteer doorkeeper came sweating to our closet and announced that he believed "they had all come." We commenced our concert, and our eyes were gladdened with the sight of a room full of joyous-looking persons of both sexes, fanning themselves for dear life. The concert went off finely, notwithstanding it was exclusively vocal. When it was concluded, our amateur doorkeeper made his returns, and we found ourselves in possession of the very handsome sum — in our circumstances — of forty-seven dollars — quite a fortune!

Armed with this fortune, the Smith family progressed to Brunswick, New Jersey, where Sol left his wife and child with relatives of hers, and went on himself to New York in an effort to break into the metropolitan theatre. In this effort he was completely unsuccessful, and hard days followed, when he kept a bookshop in New York; took a friend's telescope to the corner of Broadway and Chambers Street and sold peeps at the moon for sixpence; acted as editor of a paper in Trenton; gave a vocal concert in Perth Amboy; borrowed;

tried once more to get into the company at the Park Theatre; failed; and at last engaged himself with a traveling company again, headed for western New York.

This venture fared well enough till Sol took it into his head to be a manager again, and tried his luck in Canada. At Niagara the company had a fist fight with a lot of Canadians; in Toronto Sol insulted the Governor by addressing him as "Mister" instead of "Your Excellency"; and nowhere was business good. Ultimately Sol and a little party of players embarked in two skiffs at Warren, to float down the Allegheny.

The young men of the company who preceded us in our downward course were to display a flag as a signal to us whenever they had "taken a town." One day we discovered a white handkerchief flying at the end of a pole on the riverbank, where there was not a house — much less a town — to be seen. We obeyed the signal and pulled to the shore; but there was nobody to meet us. After waiting half an hour and concluding we were hoaxed, it was agreed we should pursue our way down the river. We had not proceeded more than twenty rods when we saw the boat of our companions lying high and dry upon the shore. This convinced us that the party was not far off, and we accordingly made another halt. Before we reached the land we were hailed from the top of a high bluff: "Halloo — the boat! Pull ashore; this is the town you are to stop at; your actors are up at my house waiting for you!"

The person who spoke soon came down to us, and, sure enough, we found we were advertised to perform that same night in Lewiston. "Yes," continued the man, whose name was Cartwright, "it's all fixed: look at the bills posted on the trees — you'll have a good house; the citizens are delighted with your visit." He had a conveyance — a one-horse wagon — for the women and child, and Francisco and myself walked up the hill in search of the town of Lewiston. But no town could we see. "Oh, you are looking for the houses! Bless ye, they are not built yet; but we shall have some splendid buildings shortly. Here is Broadway; Wall Street runs down in this direction; and do you see the blazed tree yonder? There's to be our courthouse; and a little beyond, the jail. Oh, Lewiston is destined to be a place." Thus spoke our guide and landlord as he drove his little wagon through the but partially cleared paths toward his house.

We arrived at length, and found our party very comfortably situated in a double log-cabin, which was literally covered with playbills that most respectfully announced to the inhabitants of Lewiston and vicinity that Mr. Sol Smith and his dramatic company would perform on such an evening the comic opera of *The Poor Soldier*, with the afterpiece of *Lovers' Quarrels*. I scarcely knew what to think of the whole proceeding. An audience seemed to me out of the question. Where they were to come from I could not imagine.

"Come up and look at the theatre," invitingly spoke the landlord, when he had introduced our wives to his wife. I followed him upstairs. "You see we have fitted up this room pretty neatly," said he — and so

they had. The room was twelve by sixteen, and the scenery and curtain were rigged up in one end of it, while three large benches represented the boxes and pit. Whether it was all a joke, or whether the man was mad, I did not stop to inquire, for dinner was announced and there was no mistake in that; it was a first-rate one. We found that our landlord was a New Yorker, just settled in the new town of Lewiston, which he imagined would soon rise into a place of great consequence and become the emporium of Lewis County. Being passionately fond of theatricals, and accidentally falling in with our pioneers the day before, ten miles above the town, he had persuaded them to stop and give an entertainment.

Dinner over, we soon found it was really expected we should play; for the audience began to assemble from every direction — the men and women all coming on horseback. An unexpected difficulty now presented itself: there was not a candle in the town — that is, in the house. What was to be done? Night was coming on; we could not act in the dark, that was certain. The landlord hit upon an expedient at last. He tore up some linen, of which he made wicks, and, rolling them in tallow, soon made six decent candles. He thereupon took half-a-dozen large potatoes and boring holes in them, converted them into candlesticks, placing them on the floor in front of the curtain, for footlights. He next called his neighbors up to the bar by proclamation, and told them the box office was open. In ten minutes they were all supplied with tickets — mostly on a credit — and he proceeded to "open the doors," — acting himself as doorkeeper, — informing all who

entered that checks were not transferable, and no smoking was allowed in any part of the theatre; "and, gentlemen, no admission behind the scenes under any pretense whatever!" When our audience was seated he announced the fact to us, and admonished us that the curtain was advertised to rise at eight o'clock precisely.

In our narrow quarters a change of dress, after we once entered the theatre, was not to be thought of: there was no getting to the dressing-rooms without passing among the auditors, there being but one door to the room. So Norah and Leonora, being played by the same person, wore the same dress; and so with the other characters.

Mr. Cartwright was enthusiastic in his applause, declaring to his friends and neighbors that the performances were nearly equal to those at the Park — only in the latter establishment, he was free to admit, the scenery and decorations were a shade better than those of the Lewiston theatre. The benches being all occupied, he squatted himself down by the potato footlights and at intervals amused himself by snuffing the candles. At length, one by one, the lights began to give out, and we were in danger of being left in total darkness. Observing the state of affairs, I thought it time to bring the farce to a close, which I did by cutting *Lovers' Quarrels* rather short, reconciling the parties in the middle of the piece, and speaking the "tag." Down came the curtain, and out went the last candle! The potatoes were all tenantless; so was the room in a few minutes, the auditors making their way downstairs the best way they could, highly delighted with their entertainment.

Mr. Cartwright and his worthy wife soon raised a sort of lamp, constructed out of a piece of twisted linen and some hog's lard in a saucer, and after listening to our landlord's critical remarks on the whole performance and discussing an excellent supper, we retired for the night.

Next morning, while breakfast was preparing, Mr. C—— took me about "the town," pointing out the different embryo streets and the sites for the public buildings — a theatre among the rest. His nearest neighbor resided at the distance of three miles, but he was sanguine in his expectations that Lewiston would in time be a great town. Well — it may, "in time"; but, I fear, not in Cartwright's time nor in mine. The charge for dinner, supper, lodging, breakfast, and the theatre — including the lighting of the same — was a mere trifle, and we parted from our host with regret. He was a perfect original. "Farewell, Mr. Manager," said he; "hope you have been pleased with our town, and will visit Lewiston again next season when I hope to have the new theatre finished for you."

It seems a pity that the hopeful Mr. Cartwright's name was not Babbitt! I have quoted this incident at length, not only because it is amusing and a vivid picture of the American theatre on the frontier, but because unconsciously it throws such a light on the psychology of the "booster." The booster follows the flag: he is a product of the frontier. We cannot repudiate him without repudiating our past. And I am not sure but Sol Smith's

attitude toward him was a more sensible one than Sinclair Lewis's. However, Sol was probably more like him.

After other adventures, Sol and his party reached Pittsburgh, where the constables had not forgotten him, and took away what little he had made on the trip. Disgusted, and — one gathers — for the moment discouraged, he disbanded his company and went on with only his wife and son to Cincinnati, which he reached in 1826, two years and a half after leaving it, and without a cent in his pocket.

For the next year Sol kept busy as a strolling player, chiefly in Kentucky. He finally secured an engagement with James H. Caldwell, the manager who had previously engaged Forrest for his New Orleans company, and joined the troupe at Nashville. Here he was called upon to sing an original song of sixteen stanzas, to the tune of "Gee-ho-Dobbin," when General Jackson visited the theatre. At the close of the season the whole company departed by steamboat for New Orleans.

In 1827 the English drama was but a decade old in this city, still so largely Creole, but it was flourishing at the American Theatre on Camp Street. There were twenty-seven men and women in Caldwell's company, and the visits of stars were frequent. The life of the city was a gay one, and this, together with its position as terminal of the

great commercial artery of the Mississippi River, made it hardly inferior to New York as a field for the showman. Here Mrs. Smith made her début as Diana Vernon in *Rob Roy*, and Sol as Billy Lackaday in *Sweethearts and Wives*. During the winter he had a chance to support the elder Booth, as the physician in *King Lear* and the Lord Mayor in *Richard III*, as well as in other plays. Booth was then (1827–28) at the height of his truly great powers — great, though often uncontrolled or carelessly used. Drink had not mastered him yet, nor was he the victim of his later strange eccentricities — as when he once entered the stage, as Cassius, on the tips of his toes. After playing at the English theatre in New Orleans this season of 1828, he went over to the French theatre and acted Orestes twice, being hailed by the French inhabitants as a second Talma. While the lank comedian, Sol Smith, had of course no call to imitate the tragedian, the experience of playing with him must have been useful and taught him something about standards — though, to be sure, he makes no mention of that fact.

When the winter season was over, the company set out up the river to play at Natchez. Here the theatre was new.

It was situated at the extreme end of the main street, and in a graveyard. Two hundred yards of the

street leading to it had been cut through this "last receptacle of humanity," and every day, in going to rehearsal, our sights were regaled with the view of leg-bones sticking horizontally out of the earth ten or twelve feet above us, the clay having gradually washed away and left them thus exposed. The dressing-rooms for the gentlemen were under the stage, the earth having been excavated to make room for them. Human bones were strewn about in every direction. The first night, the lamplighter, being a little pushed for time to get all ready, seized upon a skull, sticking two tallow candles in the eye-sockets, and I found my dressing-room thus lighted. In digging the grave of Hamlet, I experienced no difficulty in finding bones and skulls to "play at loggats with."

The good people of Natchez did not seem to mind bones, for the brief season was a profitable one, the company then moving on to St. Louis. In 1828, St. Louis was a town of but six thousand people, and the theatre was in a salt house on Second Street, fitted over by Caldwell the year before. Here Sol acted Mr. Mawworm in *The Hypocrite* — again one of Holcroft's parts. The following winter they were all back in New Orleans, with Junius Brutus Booth as the stage manager for a time, and George Holland, destined to become a famous comedian and the father of E. M., George, and Joseph Holland, well remembered by all of us who are over forty. Even the elder George Holland

himself, though born in England in 1791, was long enough active on the stage to be a member of Augustin Daly's company in its early days. Of Booth, Sol records that: "His 'eccentricities' began to crop out about this time, and interfered somewhat with the interests of the theatre." Unfortunately, he does not tell us what they were.

Before the close of the season, Sol and his brother Lemuel withdrew from the company, organized a small troupe, and started out for themselves. They played Port Gibson, Vicksburg, — where they acted four weeks in what would be classed to-day as a one-night stand, — and Memphis, then a village of six hundred people, where the theatre was a room fitted up in the residence of a Mr. Young, next to his warehouse. They acted here eight nights, to average receipts of less than forty dollars a night. They then started inland, traveling by wagon and playing in rooms or halls, often without scenery. The people, Sol says, "seemed to come out of the woods"; but they came, and the actors took in thirty or forty dollars a night in these remote villages. At Jackson they played in a log house twelve nights, with total receipts of four hundred and eighty dollars! When they reached Florence, Alabama, they acted in the garret of the hotel, and took in but two hundred and fifty-one dollars in seven nights. Sol here heroically resists

his punning propensity, and says nothing about the Attic drama. He does point out, however, that they encountered frequently in these Southern towns the rival attraction of preachers — revivalists, no doubt — who thundered against the wicked playhouse. Reaching Tuscaloosa, the company played in that city from September to January, and Sol paid his salaries, but made not a cent for himself.

In January 1830, Smith rented a new theatre in Montgomery, built by a Thespian Society, and remained there two weeks, doing a good business and presenting, on two nights, Madame Feron, a singer who had come from England two years before and had made something of a reputation. He paid her $101 for the two nights, and thus records the manner of her appearance: —

> As we were without a regular orchestra, various means were resorted to for an accompaniment to her songs. A pianoforte was introduced upon the stage, and she accompanied herself in some pieces; in others she pressed me into the service. Thus, in the farce entitled *Of Age To-morrow*, the dialogue was necessarily changed a little from the original text: —
>
> MARIA. I had a lover once.
>
> BARON. A lover? Twenty, I dare say.
>
> MARIA. But he deserted me.
>
> BARON. Deserted you? Impossible. What had he to say for himself?

MARIA. He said nothing; but (*if you'll have the kindness to seat yourself at that piano, and give me an accompaniment*) I'll tell you what I said to him.

Suiting the action to the word, the accommodating Baron Willinghurst — personated by the writer hereof — seated himself at the piano, and the beautiful song, "As I hang on your bosom," was gloriously breathed forth by the great prima donna of European opera, in a theatre surrounded by uncut trees, and occupied by an audience whose appreciation was as warm as that of the dilettanti of Italy. In the farce of *No Song, No Supper*, to account for the presence in Farmer Crop's house of so rich an article of furniture as a pianoforte, Crop was constrained to say that a rich neighbor had stored it there until he could get his new house ready for its reception. Thus accounting for the instrument being there, it was an easy matter to ask Margaretta to play upon it; then a song was asked for, and after that another, and so on. Madame Feron entered into the spirit of the scene and seemed to enjoy herself very much, imparting her good humor to all around, both before and behind the curtain. Mr. Maddox, since manager of the Princess Theatre, London, accompanied Madame Feron as her man of business. From Montgomery she proceeded to New Orleans, where she had an engagement.

Soon after we find Sol at Natchez, dividing himself between that town and Port Gibson, fifty miles away. He alternated between the two places, making the trip on horseback every day except

Sundays, for almost a month. Here is an extract from his Journal at the time: —

Wednesday. — Rose at break of day. Horse at the door. Swallowed a cup of coffee while the boy was tying on leggins. Reached Washington at 8. Changed horses at 9 — again at 10 — and at 11. At 12 arrived at Port Gibson. Attended rehearsal — settled business with stage manager. Dined at 4. Laid down and endeavored to sleep at 5. Up again at 6. Rubbed and washed by Jim (a negro boy). Dressed at 7. Acted the *Three Singles* and *Splash*. To bed at 11½.

Thursday. — Rose and breakfasted at 9. At 10 attended rehearsal for the pieces of next day. At 1, leggins tied on, and braved the mud for a fifty-mile ride. Rain falling all the way. Arrived at Natchez at half past 6. Rubbed down and took supper. Acted *Ezekiel Homespun* and *Delph* to a poor house. To bed (stiff as steelyards) at 12.

Friday. — Cast pieces — counted tickets — attended rehearsal until 1 P.M. To horse again for Port Gibson — arrived at 7. No time to eat dinner or supper. Acted in the *Magpie and Maid*, and *No Song, No Supper*, in which latter piece I managed to get a few mouthfuls of cold roasted mutton and some dry bread, they being the first food tasted this day! etc., etc., etc., etc.

But at the end of the season he had enough money to pay that debt of $1100 he had so long owed in Cincinnati. We think he had earned it.

The next few years were spent in acting and managing his company through the South. They

traveled, of course, in horse-drawn conveyances, and often through primitive or even wild country. One of his stopping-places was Columbus, Georgia, that city of wide streets laid out by army engineers on the banks of the magnificently curving, red Chattahoochee River — now hidden from view by cotton mills. At that time, the Creek Indians lived on a reservation on the Alabama side. There was no theatre, but Sol was not disturbed by so insignificant an item. He called for the best contractor in the place, told him what he wanted; and presently this paragraph appeared in the local newspaper: —

EXPEDITION — A theatre, 70 feet long by 40 wide, was commenced on Monday morning last by our enterprising fellow citizen, Mr. Bates, and finished on Thursday afternoon in season for the reception of Mr. Sol Smith's company on that evening. A great portion of the timber, on Monday morning, waved to the breeze in its native forest; fourscore hours afterward its massive piles were shaken by the thunder of applause in the crowded assemblage of men.

In this theatre of mushroom growth, *Pizarro* was acted one evening with real Indians for the Peruvian army.

The effect was very striking, but there were some unrehearsed effects not set down in the bills. I had bargained with a chief for twenty-four Creek Indians —

to furnish their own bows, arrows, and tomahawks — at fifty cents each and a glass of whiskey. Unfortunately for the entire success of the performance, the whiskey was paid and drunk in advance, causing a great degree of exhilaration among our new supes. They were ranged at the back of the theatre building, in an open lot, during the performance of the first Act, and on the commencement of the second they were marshaled into the back door, and posted upon the stage behind the scenes. The entrance of Rolla was the signal for a "shout" by the company, carpenters, and scene-shifters; the Indians, supposing their time had come, raised such a yell as I am sure had never before been heard inside of a theatre. This outburst being quelled, the scene between Alonzo, Cora, and the Peruvian Chief was permitted to proceed to its termination uninterrupted; but when the scene changed to the Temple of the Sun, disclosing the troops of Rolla — his brave associates, partners of his toil, his feelings, and his fame — drawn up on each side of the stage in battle array, the plaudits of the audience were answered by whoops and yells that might be, and no doubt were, heard a mile off. Order being partially restored, Rolla addressed his army, and was greeted with another series of shouts and yells even louder than those which had preceded.

Now came my turn to take part in the unique performance. As High Priest of the Sun, and followed by half a dozen virgins and as many priests, with measured step, timed to slow music, I emerged from behind the scenes, and with solemn march perambulated the stage, in dumb show calling down a blessing on the

swords of King Ataliba and General Rolla; and in the usual impressive style, looking up into the front gallery, commenced the Invocation to the Sun. Before the time for the joining in of the chorus, I found I was not entirely alone in my singing. A humming sound, at first low and mournful and rising gradually to *forte*, greeted my ear; and when our chorus did join in the strain, it was quite overpowered by the rising storm of *fortissimo* sounds which were issuing from the stentorian lungs of the savages; in short, the Indians were preparing for battle by executing, in their most approved style, the Creek war-song and dance!

To attempt stopping them we found would be a vain task; so that, after a moment or two of hesitation, the virgins made a precipitate retreat to their dressing-rooms, where they carefully locked themselves in. The King, Rolla, and Orano stood their ground, and were compelled to submit to the new order of things. The Indians kept up their song and war-dance for full half an hour, performing the most extraordinary feats ever exhibited on a stage, in their excitement scalping King Ataliba (taking off his wig), demolishing the altar, and burning up the Sun! As for Lem and I (Rolla and the High Priest), we joined in with them and danced until the perspiration fairly rolled from our bodies in large streams, the savages all the time flourishing their tomahawks and knives around our heads, and performing other little playful antics not by any means agreeable or desirable. At last, to put an end to a scene which was becoming more and more tiresome as it proceeded, an order was given to drop the curtain. This stroke of policy did not stop the ceremonies,

which proceeded without intermission until the savages had finished their song and dance, when, each receiving his promised half-dollar, they consented to leave the house, and our play proceeded without them.

Next night the same troupe came to the theatre and wanted to assist in the performance of *Macbeth*, but I most positively declined their valuable aid.

At Columbus Sol made the acquaintance of Mirabeau B. Lamar, who afterwards went to Texas, fought at San Jacinto, and was elected President of the "redeemed" territory. Lamar wrote a newspaper article about the company, and his estimate of Sol's own acting is probably a just one, though unquestionably when Smith later appeared in a city like New York he was clever enough to cut out much of the gagging which he found effective with his rural audiences.

Now then for "Old Sol." But, before entering upon the trial of this head and front of the battalion, it may be proper to settle a preliminary question upon which his acquittal or condemnation chiefly rests. The heart will sometimes laugh in defiance of the sober decrees of the head, and when this is the case, which is in the right? Who has not had his risibility irresistibly excited by a joke which his judgment could not sanction? Shall the joke therefore be condemned? That is the question. We answer, No. Now this is exactly Old Sol's situation. His acting we cannot approve as being always in good taste, yet he will extort the laugh from

us in despite of our disapprobation. Shall we therefore condemn him? We answer, No. Our objection to him as an actor is, that he often lowers comedy to a farce, and brings farce to the borders of buffoonery. The approbation which we have to bestow is that which we have just admitted — his absolute dominion over our risible propensities. He never fails to accomplish the end and aim of all comic performances, that of exciting involuntary laughter and applause.

This, however, is not his only merit. He possesses a lively fancy and a good fund of original wit, which enable him to introduce many seasonable jokes, acceptable to all and offensive to none. This practice, it is true, is liable to abuse, and stands reprobated by authority no less than Shakespeare; but, with all due deference to the Bard of Avon, we must still adhere to our infallible rule: to censure nothing and praise all that produces a happy effect; by virtue of which Old Sol is entitled to our high commendation and a full absolution for all faults, which we do hereby freely award him.

1833 found Sol back in Cincinnati to visit his family, and amused by the advent of the Chapman family.

The "Chapman family," consisting of old Mr. Chapman, William Chapman, George Chapman, Caroline Chapman, and Harry and Thérèse Chapman (children), came to the West this summer, opened a theatre at Louisville, and afterward established and carried into operation that singular affair, the Floating Theatre, concerning which so many anecdotes are told. The

family were all extremely fond of fishing, and during the "waits" the actors amused themselves by dropping a line over the stern of the ark. On one occasion, while playing *The Stranger* (Act IV, Scene 1), there was a long wait for Francis, the servant of the misanthropic Count Walbourgh.

"Francis! Francis!" called the Stranger.

No reply.

"Francis! Francis!" (a pause). "Francis!" rather angrily called the Stranger again.

A very distant voice replied, "Coming, sir!" A considerable pause, during which the Stranger walked up and down, à la Macready, in a great rage. "Francis!"

FRANCIS (*entering*). Here I am, sir.

STRANGER. Why did you not come when I called?

FRANCIS. Why, sir, I was just hauling in one of the d—dest big catfish you ever saw!

It was some minutes before the laughter of the audience could be restrained sufficiently to allow the play to proceed.

It is said of this Floating Theatre that it was cast loose during a performance at one of the river towns in Indiana by some mischievous boys, and could not be landed for half-a-dozen miles, the large audience being compelled to walk back to their village.

More touring in the South followed, with a season in Montgomery when George Holland was his partner. Then in 1835 Smith turned his steps toward New York again, the goal even in those days of all actors; and just ten years after he had been

turned down at the Park Theatre, he was engaged there as a star. He opened as Mawworm in *The Hypocrite* and was at least moderately successful. On alternate nights he appeared at the Walnut Street Theatre in Philadelphia. The Philadelphia playbills referred to him as "The Liston of the South." He seems most to have amused his audiences in Garrick's farce, *The Lying Valet.* Mr. and Mrs. Wheatly and both Tom and Henry Placide were in the Park company at the time.

His season ended in September and he at once embarked for Charleston, rejoined his own company at Mobile, and resumed his managerial career, which in course of time brought him into command of theatres in New Orleans and St. Louis, and into contact with the leading stars of the day. In Mobile he tried the experiment of giving an opera, *Cinderella,* the first opera ever given with completeness in the city. A friend declared to him the next day that everybody liked it, but that they would like it even better if he would cut out the music.

Here, strictly speaking, Old Sol's connection with the frontier theatre ends; he had become a man of influence in the larger centres and an actor who had starred at the Park. Even Barnum did not scorn to employ his resources both as showman and lawyer, during the Jenny Lind tour, as you may learn from Barnum's own book. (I have in my collection,

by the way, a delightful Barnum item. Someone had evidently asked the great man for an autograph, and he copied out and signed — the Lord's Prayer!) But it is not easy to leave Old Sol, especially as so much of his later life was knit up with the tours of those players who entertained America in the mid-nineteenth century. Let us follow him a little longer, and meet some of his visiting celebrities.

In the winter of 1838–39, in Mobile, he presented, among other visitors, Dan Marble, a troupe of horses, — who, he says, "drew" well, — "the irresistible Ellen Tree," Edwin Forrest for fourteen nights, followed by the elder Booth for ten nights. Miss Tree in twelve nights drew as her share $2229.25, while the theatre received $3729.25. Booth, who received $100 per night, never drew more than $300 into the house, and often less than $200, except with his *Richard III.* Master Burke, a youth from Ireland who came to America in 1830, a troupe of Bedouin Arabs, Céleste, the famous dancer, and last Miss Jean (Sol calls her "Jane") Davenport with her father, all followed. There were, between times, other and now forgotten performers. The ability of Mobile in those early days to absorb theatrical amusement is rather astonishing.

Miss Davenport was at that time a mere child.

Her father came from England, and the girl made her début at the Park Street Theatre in New York when she was eight years old, as Little Pickle in *The Spoiled Child*. She then ventured upon *Richard III* (according to Brown's *History of the American Stage*), and after appearing in England, was brought back to America and sent out on a tour which carried her to Mobile and Sol Smith's theatre. By 1844 she was acting Juliet in London. She was the original of Dickens's "Infant Phenomenon," and her father of Crummles. Mobile, in 1838, had little use for either of them, however, even their benefit attracting but $130 into the house. In later years, after she had become famous as an adult actress, she had a summer cottage at Lynn, Massachusetts. In 1860 she was married in San Francisco to General Frederick West Lander, by the Reverend Thomas Starr King. General Lander was killed in 1862, and his widow served in a Union hospital during the remainder of the war — a rôle she played with great skill and devotion. It was not until 1865 that she reappeared on the stage.

In 1843 Sol tried as an experiment an invasion of Cuba. We find this passage in his book: —

> Cuba is a Spanish island, governed by military people, 25,000 of whom favor the country with their presence. The inhabitants eat, sleep, smoke, and ride in volantes drawn by horses a good way ahead, with

JEAN MARGARET (DAVENPORT) LANDER AS LITTLE PICKLE IN "THE SPOILED CHILD"

tails braided and hitched to the saddlebows, which horses are ridden by black men dressed in livery, with jack boots and long spurs. The amusements of the people consist of the opera, Spanish plays badly acted, bull-baiting, and cock-fighting.

As he lost $4000 by the expedition, its brevity may be forgiven.

The old St. Charles Theatre in New Orleans having been destroyed by fire, Sol built another one on the same site, declaring that the work was done in forty days, the house opening in January 1843. Among the visiting stars that first season were J. H. Hackett, father of James K. Hackett, and by all accounts the best Falstaff who has ever played the rôle in America, Dan Marble, and George Vandenhoff.

Vandenhoff was a well-educated Englishman, of a sober, inquiring mind, who first appeared on the stage at Covent Garden in 1839, and made his American début at the Park Theatre, New York, in September 1842, as Hamlet. A month later he acted at the Walnut Street Theatre, Philadelphia, where Charlotte Cushman was playing and serving as stage manager. In 1860, after he had retired from the stage and been admitted to the New York bar, Vandenhoff wrote a book, published by the Appletons, called *Leaves from an Actor's Note Book.*

Charlotte Cushman [he writes] whom I met now for the first time, was by no means, then, the actress which she afterward became. She displayed at that day a rude, strong, uncultivated talent; it was not till after she had seen and acted with Mr. Macready — which she did the next season — that she really brought artistic study and finish to her performances. At this time she was frequently careless in the text, and negligent of rehearsals. She played the Queen to me in *Hamlet*, and I recollect her shocking my ear and very much disturbing my impression of the reality of the situation, by her saying to me in the closet-scene (Act III): —

> What wilt thou do? Thou wilt not kill me?

instead of

> What wilt thou do? Thou wilt not murder me?

thus substituting a weak word for a strong one, diluting the force, and destroying the rhythm of the verse. She was much annoyed at her error when I told her of it, but confessed that she had always so read the line, unconscious of being wrong.

I played Rolla with her; and she was, even then, the best Elvira I ever saw. The power of her scorn and the terrible earnestness of her revenge were immense. Her greatest part, fearfully natural, dreadfully intense, horribly real, was Nancy Sykes in the dramatic version of *Oliver Twist;* it was too true; it was painful — this actual presentation of Dickens's poor, abandoned, abused, murdered outcast of the streets: a tigress with a touch — and but one — of woman's almost deadened nature, blotted and trampled underfoot by man's cruelty and sin.

It is in darkly shadowed lurid-tinged characters of a low order, like this and Meg Merrilies, — half human, half demon, with the savage, animal reality of passion and the weird fascination of crime, redeemed by fitful flashes of womanly feeling, — that she excels. I never admired her Lady Macbeth. It is too animal; it wants intellectual confidence, and relies too much on physical energy. Besides, she bullies Macbeth: gets him into a corner of the stage, and — as I heard a man with more force than elegance, express it — she "pitches into him"; in fact, as one sees her large clenched hand and muscular arm threatening him in alarming proximity, one feels that if other arguments fail with her husband, she will have recourse to blows. Meg Merrilies has been her great fortune-teller and fortune-maker.

A few months later, returning to Philadelphia, Vandenhoff played Mercutio and lent a costume to Miss Cushman that she might play Romeo — her first perpetration of that famous theatrical outrage.

Theatrical business in the North was evidently poor in 1842, and Vandenhoff, as he records in his book, went to New Orleans in the hope of better times, as well as being drawn by the fame of that gay city. He reached there while Sol Smith's new house was in course of erection, — he says it took sixty days and nights to build, not forty, — and while he waited, looked about the town. This was the city where Forrest went as a youth of sixteen, and according to all accounts, fell into dissipated

society. This was the city where the elder Booth, if Sol Smith is to be believed, first began to exhibit his eccentricities. Something of this may be explained, perhaps, by Vanderhoff's descriptions, which include things generally omitted from that romantic fiction about the Creole days, to which we have been treated.

Sometimes the ordinary flow of life was ruffled by a squall or two, which troubled its surface, dashed a little spray around, and all was right again. Now and then a *duel à l'outrance* would furnish a day's interest; sometimes the immense barroom, in which thousands assembled at a time, was the scene of a little excitement: high words would be heard at one end; a scuffle perhaps; a general clearing took place for a moment, a pistol-shot or two were fired, a body was carried out, the lookers-on closed up again, and the matter was forgotten.

Or the orderly current of a quadrille in a ballroom, or the mazy movements of the waltz, were broken by a quick and fatal stab that left some much-coveted damsel unpartnered for a moment; but the music scarcely stops, the waters join, the half-uttered compliment is taken up again, the half-told anecdote is concluded, the interrupted laughter rings livelier, louder than before. On goes the dance, and joy is unconfined. Eyes sparkle, feet twinkle, white shoulders shine beneath a thousand lamps, swelling bosoms heave and pant and sigh, as triumph, love, or envy moves them; and gay cavaliers flit about, pouring volleys of quick-

winged compliments, or shooting feathered darts of passionate admiration, till the ears of the fair tingle again; and one is bewildered by the many-tongued accents, that make the ballroom a Babel of confused delight.

One phase of its particolored life particularly struck me. It was what were called Society balls. They were got up by subscription among men of wealth and fashion, by whom invitations were issued and arrangements made that brought together, on the evening of each ball, the most agreeable men — citizens, and strangers, a select party — and the most beautiful quadroons that New Orleans could boast.

By the kindness of an influential friend, I received a card for one of these reunions, and attended it with great curiosity and interest. On entering the salle, which was a large, handsome, well-lighted room, I found a company consisting of about a hundred or a hundred and twenty — male and female; the dancing was at its height; but as orderly, decent, and well conducted as in the salons of Paris or New York. As far as propriety of behavior and *retenue* went, it would have made Mabille blush for itself — if Mabille ever blushed! No liberties, no freedom of action or words. There was a perfect blaze of warm voluptuous beauty: an assemblage of as finely formed, bright-eyed houris as ever I looked on at one glance. None of them were strongly marked with the features or betraying signs of their race; most of them would pass — in the glare of artificial light, as I saw them — for brunettes — *bien prononcées*, it is true. Some of them showed no tinge of their descent at all, but could boast complex-

ions — not blond, certainly, but of Anglo-American whiteness. Yet, all these girls had in their blood the fatal taint of Africa's sun; though in some it was diluted by admixture to an infinitesmal point that required the nicest eye to detect it — if indeed it could be detected at all.

Around the room, ranged on divans in solemn state, watchful as owls and wrinkled as Hecate, sat the mothers of these odalisques: vigilant she-dragons with Argus eyes, keeping sentinel-watch over their daughters' charms. After all, they were only a burlesque on the dowagers and chaperones at Almack's, the other high-life subscription-balls, where the same watchfulness and the same wrinkles — both more artfully veiled and concealed, the one by smiles and affability, the other by *blanc* and *rouge* — may be observed, directed to the same game, with this nuance of difference: that in one case the marriage of her daughter to a desirable *parti* is the dowager-countess's end and aim, while in the other the *bien-placé*-ing of her girl in love's soft bondage with a rich protector — the graver bonds of matrimony not being of force in this case — is the mark of the dowager-quadroon! An establishment for her child is the object of both. And it amused me not a little to watch the keen restless eyes of each dingy old beldame following the motions of her charge, especially on each change of partner: anxious and fidgety lest she should commit herself with a *mauvais parti* — some good fellow not quite up to her figure in dollars. Exactly as one has seen an old countess sitting on thorns and throwing out signals of distress and displeasure, when her *protegée*, the Lady Honoria, has

been so indiscreet as to dance twice with a younger son, a dashing penniless captain in the Guards! Ha! ha! ha! Poor human nature! black or white, 't is much the same, with only a shade or two of difference. The dowager-duchess bends all her arts against a mésalliance — as the law directs; the dowager-quadroon arrays her force against a mauvais parti — as the law permits. *Voilà la différence!* Life in its extremes is very much alike when its littlenesses are uncovered and its motives unveiled. Civilization only throws an elegant mantle over the naked limbs, to hide the quivering of the muscles and the passionate throbbings of the heart! *Vogue la galère!*

On Wednesday, February 7, 1844, Macready visited New Orleans for the first time; the same season Hackett was acting there, with H. Placide in his company, and Edwin Forrest was also a visitor. Macready was on his first tour of the United States, and public curiosity to see the famous English actor caused receipts of over $800 a night, which was a great deal of money for those days. Sol, however, makes little comment on his acting, and gives no indication that their relations were more than formal.

When Macready went up the river at the end of his New Orleans engagement, Old Sol was on the same boat, but we very much fear the Yankee was neither reading Macaulay nor admiring the redbuds on the bank, as Macready records that he was

doing. Sol, indeed, in all his wanderings over the frontier, never once mentions the scenery, the aspects of nature. His interest was in his fellow men, and on this trip up the Mississippi we regret to report that he was below decks, playing poker.

But there was another English actor, of somewhat later date, who would undoubtedly have got along well with Sol, if only because of their mutual devotion to that strange form of humor known as practical joking. I refer of course to the elder Sothern, whose wild capers you will find merrily recorded in his son Edward's book. In 1826 Sol formed a famous Committee on Authors and Amateurs, and was elected chairman for life. It was a droll organization, its object being, first, "to curb individuals afflicted with stage madness," and second, "to extract (incidentally) from the proceedings as much fun as the nature of the case would permit of." We fear that Sol's parenthetical "incidentally" was put in as a concession to the American passion for a moral purpose.

A single incident will suffice to illustrate the workings of this Committee. In the summer of 1841, in St. Louis, business was slack and Sol welcomed one morning the appearance of a "weak, peak-nosed, trembling individual, with a hesitating, tender voice." His name was "Jeemes Macumber," and he said he could "speak orations" and thought

THEATRICAL APPRENTICESHIP

BY

SOL. SMITH, ESQ.

I looked, and behold! he had twelve strapping fellows drawn up for my inspection, &c.

PHILADELPHIA: CAREY & HART.

1846.

TITLE PAGE OF THE FIRST ISSUE OF SOL SMITH'S REMINISCENCES

he could soon learn to act parts. After a few preliminary formalities Sol sent the candidate home, bidding him report to the full Committee the following morning. Sure enough, he arrived, spot on time, and apparently every device of the theatre, from trap doors to blue light, was employed for the initiation, with an ingenuity worthy of a band of college sophomores. He was then declared ready to appear before the public, and the joke was carried to the extent of actually presenting him before the public. Sol admits this was the first time the Committee had carried their jokes quite so far, but pleads in extenuation that the weather was very warm and the boxes very empty. In other words, he saw some money in Macumber.

The poor zany was dressed like Bombastes Furioso, given a sabre as long as himself, and stationed in a "cave flat." At the signal, this cave mouth was opened, and he bounded forth into the glare of the footlights, brandishing his sabre, made three Turkish salaams, stamped his right foot, and recited John Quincy Adams's Fourth of July Oration. At the conclusion he withdrew up stage to a chalk mark, stood upon it, saluted with his sword, and vanished down a trap, amid flashes of lightning. The audience cried encore, so he was shot up on the trap, bowed again, brandished his sword, and once more was lowered into the cellar.

If Sol is to be believed, the newspapers the next day were full of the story. Probably they were, at that. The editors were all on Sol's Committee. As a result, business the next night was decidedly better. This time Macumber entered riding on a boat carriage. At stage centre he leaped from the boat and recited "Hannibal's Address to His Army," at the conclusion being translated "in the car which is used in *Macbeth* for carrying up Mrs. Hecate." The poor boob, indeed, consented to appear every night for a week, and every night he was dressed in a different ridiculous costume, was brought upon the stage by a new method, and recited a different oration. At the end of the week, his repertoire of orations, the mechanical resources of the theatre, and probably the curiosity of the audiences, were exhausted, and Macumber retired to private life.

Do you exclaim, "What a way to fill a theatre!" or do you ask what became of dramatic illusion when such interludes were taking place during the performance of a play? Well, the other day, in a Massachusetts city much larger than St. Louis was in 1841, I went to see the local stock company present *As a Man Thinks*, which is a drama of some quality and serious purpose. Before the last Act began, the curtain rose on the set for that Act, the leading actor appeared in the clothes worn in the play, and shaking a lot of seat-checks up in a hat,

drew out ten of them, reading off the numbers. The holders of these seat-checks then advanced rather sheepishly down the aisle, and the leading man gave to each of them a present — donations, one gathered, from generous local merchants, whose names the leading man did not hesitate to repeat. I have to confess that the last Act of *As a Man Thinks*, when it finally proceeded, was without dramatic illusion. Art and advertising had not mixed. However, I also noticed that the theatre was full.

As between Sol Smith's method at his stock-company theatre in the frontier town of St. Louis in 1841, and this Twentieth-century method in a Massachusetts city, I think I would choose Sol's. It savored less of the Chamber of Commerce and it had more humor. But that either method should be necessary shows, at any rate, how pure dramatic art does not always pay the bills. The need for the showman did not vanish with the passing of the frontier.

In 1853 Sol retired from the stage. He had paid all his debts, and acquired a home in St. Louis and enough money to live on. He writes, fifteen years later: "I am blessed with a good but plain home, ditto wife; and am probably about as happy as most of my neighbors." (This good but plain wife, by the way, was his second, the first having died in

1838.) He was the father of seven sons, two of them actors: Marcus and Sol junior. He was elected in 1861 to the Missouri State Convention which saved Missouri to the Union. Several times after his retirement he was offered flattering engagements to act in New York — at Burton's Theatre — and elsewhere, but except for a few benefit performances, he never acted again. By 1868 he had reached the point of life when the stage is going to the bow-wows. He writes in the Epilogue to his book: —

In latter years the legitimate drama seems to have been nearly crushed out by what may be termed Black Crookery and White Fawnery, consisting of red and blue fires, a fine collection of French legs, calcium lights, and grand-transformation scenes. Negro minstrelsy itself, a modulated form of the drama, has had a hard struggle to maintain its ground, and has only done so by burlesquing the burlesques of the theatres. "Theatres," did I say? Where are the theatres? They seem to have nearly all vanished, and in their places we have "Academies of Music," "Olympics," "Varieties," "Gaities," "Athenæums," and "Opera Houses." The name of theatre — plain theatre — has been discarded by managers, except in a few instances. Such an organization as a regular company, engaged for a full year, is now scarcely known in New York City, which is claimed to be the theatrical headquarters of this country. At Wallack's there is a regular company for from seven to eight months in the year. With this

single exception, how are matters managed in the way of engaging companies? About thus, so far as I can learn: Actors and actresses are engaged by the job, or during the run of a piece. Mr. D—— or Mr. G—— or Mr. F—— translates a French play, or writes a sensation drama, made up of escapes from trains of cars, burning steamboats, or sinking ships, negro jigs and banjo-playing — walks down or up to the Metropolitan Hotel, which is called the "Rialto" by actors, selects from the crowd, which is always there assembled at certain hours in the day, such performers as will best suit the characters of his piece, and engages them during its run; runs his piece until it will run no longer, and then the actors may run where they please and procure other engagements — if they can. Two of our best tragedians are obliged to make up strolling companies and roam through the rural districts, in hopes of finding some lovers of the good old drama in villages which have not yet had the love of Shakespeare fumigated out of them by red fire and blue blazes. Occasionally we see a company organized "for one night only" to play in Brooklyn, Newark, Paterson, or Williamsburgh!

So, we see, the theatre was in a decline in 1868, quite as it is to-day, and quite as it was in 1768, and, for that matter, in 1698, when Jeremy Collier launched his famous denunciation!

But we shall have more to say about that decline in the 1860's.

Sol Smith died in St. Louis February 14, 1869. He was buried in Bellefontaine Cemetery, and at

his head was placed a stone which he had sometime before prepared, save for the one date.

SOL SMITH
RETIRED ACTOR
1801–1869

"Life's but a walking shadow — a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more."

"All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players."

[EXIT SOL]

SCENE IV

A Theatrical Lion on Beacon Street

Kean's successor in the Royal Line was William Charles Macready, who was born in 1793, of a "good family" on his mother's side, though his father was merely a playright and actor, was graduated from Rugby, rose to eminence on the stage, and retired to private life in 1851. He was a man of scholarly impulses, an omnivorous reader, courteous and cultured, who possessed many friends among the distinguished people of his day, particularly Charles Dickens, and who all his active life worked hard and conscientiously for what he considered the best interests of the theatre. Few actors at the head of their profession have ever felt so keenly the responsibilities of leadership. It was a curious twist of fate, therefore, that Macready should have been the cause of the most disgraceful chapter in American theatrical history — the fatal Astor Place riot in 1849, during his third tour of the States. That riot has been so often described, and its beginnings in the jealous temper and ill manners of Edwin Forrest so often traced, that we shall say nothing about it here. It is far pleasanter to point out that in the diaries of Macready, even the one

he kept during his third tour of America, after the hostility of the Forrest ruffians had begun to manifest itself in brutal ways, he expressed a sympathy for American life, an understanding of American conditions, and an appreciation of the American scene, in startling contrast to the ill-tempered criticisms of many of his countrymen, including his friend Dickens. When another Englishman complained to him of the discourtesy in America, he replied that he had never met with it, even among the humblest people, and suggested that courtesy begets its like — a deserved rebuke. He certainly brought courtesy to us, and he was probably made more welcome in American homes than any visiting actor had been before, or perhaps than any was again until the days of Henry Irving. This was especially true in Boston and Cambridge, and his diaries show that at the beginning of his last tour he was seriously considering making America his home and becoming a resident of Cambridge. If it had not been for the spite of Forrest and the Astor Place riot, Macready might have become the manager of a theatre in Boston and the trainer of American actors, with results to the development of our stage that can now be only guessed.

In "the profession" Macready was not entirely popular, because he was considered a hard taskmaster and sometimes exhibited an ungovernable

WILLIAM CHARLES MACREADY

Engraved by Posselwhite from a miniature by Thorburn

temper. His temper seems to have been, at times, the equal of Richard Mansfield's, and was probably closely allied to it. Macready, like Mansfield, possessed a driving conscience which demanded perfection, and a nervous sensitiveness. When anything went wrong, he was thrown violently out of gear and reacted immediately upon the source of the annoyance, particularly if animate. Moreover, Macready was one of those actors — they are probably rare — who are compelled every night to get into the mood of their characters in order to give a satisfactory performance. They seem unable to fix the technical expression of a rôle and then repeat it mechanically. As a result, their performances vary greatly in merit from day to day, and when anything untoward happens to throw them out of the mood, they are lost for the rest of the evening. Joseph Jefferson, in his *Autobiography*, illustrates this in the case of Macready, to show that Macready's fits of temper were the result not of an unkind disposition, but of an unfortunate temperamental equipment. Then he goes on to tell how once he stood in the wings with the elder Booth, who was singing to him, *sotto voce*, a comic song. Booth's cue came in the middle of a verse, whereupon he sprang out on the stage and played a tragic scene with his usual effectiveness, returning to Jefferson's side and finishing the comic song.

The classic example, of course, is that of Talma, who was smiling and shaking hands with a friend in the wings, during a performance of *Hamlet*. His cue came, and still holding his friend's hand and smiling, he declaimed: —

Angels and ministers of grace defend us . . .

in so awful a tone that the friend fell back against the scenery. (It will be noticed that this speech, delivered on stage in the original, had somehow got pushed into the wings in Talma's French version.)

Probably most actors, when once they have fixed the tones, the gestures, the inflections, by which they represent a character, would only be confused and made uncertain if they actually experienced the emotions they are portraying. But not so Macready. Each night, to him, was a re-living of the character, and if things did not go right around him, he lost the mood; his performance went to pieces. It is small wonder he had a temper.

It was also charged against him, particularly by George Vandenhoff, — *Leaves from an Actor's Note Book*, New York, 1860, — that he always considered himself first and the play and the other players were secondary; when he acted Othello, Iago was subordinate. When he acted Iago, poor Othello played every scene with his back to the audience. If this is true, every actor who reads it will smile

and say, "How like —— !" As a matter of fact, it does not, perhaps, so much indicate conceit — as Vanderhoff implies — as a realization that the audience which comes to see a star actor comes to see the star actor. So long as the star system prevails in the theatre, minor actors — and playrights — will complain of this conceit.

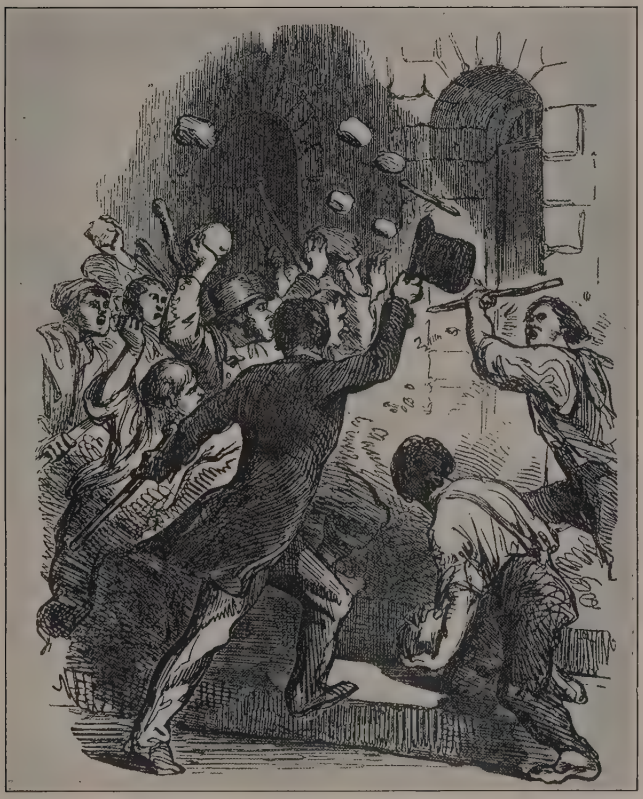
But neither Macready's temper nor his "conceit" was carried into his social life. There, from the simple honesty of his own diary, from the testimony of his friends, we envisage him as a charming, interesting, and mentally alert though serious man, who gave the best he had to all whom he met. His records of the early America are a refreshing contrast to the acidulous comments of so many of his countrymen. Only two things here really roused him to anger and scorn — slavery, as he saw it in the South, and spitting in public places and conveyances, which he also encountered in the South. He was much happier, indeed, north of the Mason and Dixon line.

Macready's first visit to America was made in 1826. He played, of course, at the Park Theatre in New York, and records a long series of pleasant dinners, and a trip of three days to see the Falls of the Passaic. From New York he went to Boston, playing for fifty pounds nightly. The theatre, he says, was crowded; the boxes "were let by auction

at premiums exceeding $200." A trip to Baltimore followed, and here he was taken to call on Charles Carroll of Carrollton, the last surviving Signer. Carroll was then ninety, but "retained all the vivacity and grace of youth, with the polish of one educated in the school of Chesterfield. I have never met with a more finished gentleman." Carroll talked with him for two hours, very frankly, predicting the future greatness of America if it "escapes the vice of intemperance in the use of ardent spirits," and insisting on coming down to the front door with him, to see him off. Macready was warmly and enthusiastically impressed.

After two months, he returned to New York for ten more engagements, and then sailed for home, but not before he had witnessed in New York a New Year's Day celebration, which his English friends thought would not please him, but which on the contrary, he says, "quite carried me away."

His next visit was made in 1843. He came by boat to Halifax and then on to Boston, writing with the greatest enthusiasm of the view as his ship sailed up the harbor. His acting, however, began in New York, where "the Miss Cushman who acted Lady Macbeth interested me much. She has to learn her art; but she showed mind, and sympathy with me — a novelty so refreshing to me on the stage." He reached Boston again on November 13, and on the fourteenth: —



THE ATTACK UPON THE ASTOR-PLACE OPERA HOUSE
MAY 10, 1849

From a contemporary print

Dined with Longfellow. Everything very elegant. Mrs. L—— is a very agreeable woman. Felton, Sumner, and Hilliard[1] dined with us.

A poet, a prospective Senator, and a college professor — Boston was doing its best!

Nov. 16: Waldo Emerson called and sat with me a short time. . . . I liked him very, very much. The simplicity and kindness of his manner charmed me. Mr. Abbott Lawrence called and sat with me some time. I liked him extremely; he invited me.

Calls and dinners followed, on and with "W. Prescott, C. Sumner's brother, Jared Sparks, Bancroft," and many more Boston notables. On November 21 is this entry in his diary: —

Went to [Abbott] Lawrence's, expecting a small party, as "the death of one of his kindred" prevented him from seeing company. Found his rooms full; was introduced to herds. Saw Ticknor, Gray, Prescott, Bancroft, Sears, Sumner, and most I knew; was introduced to Mrs. Bancroft, one of the sweetest, prettiest women I ever saw, to Ward, Miss Ward, Mrs. Chase, very agreeable . . . In fact it is impossible to recollect the very many. All were very agreeable; would have been more so if I had been a little more a free agent, but I was a lion, in good earnest. I talked with a great many people: in fact was not one moment unoccupied, for I was taken from one to the other, as if there was to be a guard against any preference. I liked almost all the people I saw . . . .

[1]Obviously, George S. Hillard

Later in the month Macready "acted Virginius in a very superior manner. Went with Sumner and Felton to the Oyster Saloon Concert Hall, where Hilliard joined us. Supped on broiled oysters, with some of the ingenious and beautifully composed— I should say constructed — drinks that are conspicuous in this country."

Where the Oyster Saloon Concert Hall was, I cannot say, but the picture of the future Senator from Massachusetts and the future President of Harvard College sitting in it, in 1843, with an actor as their guest, and drinking pousse-café, may possibly jar some of our preconceptions about our New England forbears. Nor can I refrain from quoting the menu of a dinner Macready declared concluded "a very agreeable day" in New York, a few weeks later. It consisted of "terrapin soup, bass fish, bear, wild turkey, canvasback duck, roasted oysters, etc. Delicious wines." Perhaps it is needless to state that Macready acted only four nights a week.

In January 1844, Macready journeyed overland from Savannah to Mobile, and considering the fact that much of the way was by wagon or stage through almost a wilderness, that the stage tipped over in the rain, that the passengers often had to get out and walk in the mud, that the lodgings were atrocious, and that he was constantly

encountering evidences of slavery which cut him to the quick, his diary remains extraordinarily good-natured, and is full of enthusiastic comments on the beauties of the country, especially the sweep of the red Chattahoochie and the leafless, ghost-like sycamores. When he was able to ride inside the jolting stage, he read *Joseph Andrews!*

From New Orleans, Macready made his first trip up the Mississippi by steamer, to the Ohio, and up that to Cincinnati. It was, to him, a long adventure. He got very little reading done, except *Samson Agonistes*, so thrilled was he by the endless panorama of stream and banks. Here is a typical entry in his diary: —

On the Miss. April 2. In the evening two brightly reflected lights stretching far out to the horizon, with smoke before them, were pointed out to me as the prairies on fire. The foliage yesterday and to-day has been beautifully enriched by the red or dark pink blossom, covering the tree like a peach, of the Arbor Judas or redbud; these, often side by side with the snowy blossom that powdered the dogwood tree, diversified by color and form the lofty and leafless cottonwood. The voyage of the Mississippi most beautiful.

I remember coming one spring into Pittsburgh from the West, and seeing all along the scarred and grimed banks of the gorge brave bursts of redbud, hanging above desolation and doing their

best to flaunt "the rose of beauty on the brow of chaos." I thought then of Macready, as I have thought of him often in the Southern mountains, when the redbuds gleamed like colored fountains in the dappled sunlight of a cove, or I came into a tiny clearing and saw a weathered gray cabin like a boulder surrounded by bursts of peach and pear and cherry bloom. Such beauties he saw and admired, and if he had settled in the New World, perhaps he would have had some influence on our gardening as well as our acting. As it is, the best American gardens are generally those which have been left most alone, and where our native flora has been given a chance.

On the season of 1843–44 Macready made a net profit of £5500. He records that *Hamlet* took in more money than any other play.

His third and last visit commenced in Boston, in September 1848. Charles Sumner called on him the day his boat arrived, and the following day found him in Cambridge, calling on Felton, Longfellow, and Norton. The very next day Felton and Longfellow came in to Boston to see him, and took him for a walk.

Met Mr. Quincy, ex-President of Harvard College . . . called on the Carys, and saw Miss Eliza, a very intelligent, agreeable girl. Left card at Col. Perkins'. Called on Mrs. Story; saw an excellent likeness in

MELODEON.

Lessee for Dramatic Intellectual Representations, LEANDER BODKEY. Director of the Interior Management, M. J. CONWAY.

THE MELODEON will be opened on MONDAY Evening, Sept. 30, 1844, for the purpose of bringing before the enlightened Patrons some of the richest DRAMATIC GEMS that have been penned by man. Compositions which have received the attention and admiration of all past ; and more particularly men of high and cultivated minds. Come to the pleasure and edification even to read them ; how much more so to HEAR the conceptions of thought and see the VERY IMAGE pass before us. Many have desired to witness this, but have been prevented by certain objections, which in the Melodeon, are entirely done away with. Nothing will meet the eye or ear to shock even the most fastidious. And to carry out this plan,

MACREADY

the greatest Shakspearian reader and delineator of all Europe, has been engaged for a few nights, and will appear before a Boston Public, on the above evening, in the justly celebrated and much admired character of HAMLET,—and in order to give full effect to this brilliant production, the following talented Artists are engaged :—

Miss Charlotte Cushman, from Philadelphia.
Mrs. Duvenal, from the Park, New-York.
Miss Grove, from Canada.
Mrs. Maywood, from New-York, &c. &c.
Mr. Ryder, from London, England.
Mr. Wheatley, from the National, Philadelphia.
Mr. Bellamy, from Charleston, S. Carolina.
Mr. Chantreau, from N. Orleans.
Mr. Wilson, from Canada.
Mr. Ayling, of Boston.
Mr. W. Marshall, of Boston.
Mr. Mesteyer, from New-York.
Mr. Pardey, from Canada.
Mr. Reeve, from Dublin.
Mr. Phillips, from Baltimore.
Mr. Egan, from Hobbie.
Mr. Arnold, from Montreal.

On WEDNESDAY EVENING, OCT. 2d, 1844,

Will be read and represented, SHAKSPEAR'S great composition, entitled

HAMLET.

HAMLET, - - - - - - MR. MACREADY.

GHOST	Mr. RYDER.	GUILDENSTERN	MESTEYER.
LAERTES	WHEATLEY.	FIRST ACTOR	WILSON.
POLONIUS	BELLAMY.	SECOND ACTOR	PHILLIPS.
1st GRAVE DIGGER	T'WELLER.	MARCELLUS	REEVE.
OSRIC	SHAW.	BERNARDO	PARDEY.
HORATIO	AYLING.	SAILOR	EGAN.
KING CLAUDIUS	W.MARSHALL.	PRIEST	ARNOLD.
ROSENCRANTZ	CHANFREAU.		
QUEEN GERTRUDE,	Miss C. CUSHMAN.		
OPHELIA	Mrs. DUVENAL.	ACTRESS	Miss GROVE.

To conclude with the laughable Comic Drama, called

PLEASANT NEIGHBOURS :

Or, CONTENTMENT VS. RICHES.

Nancy Strap, Mrs. WM. H. SMITH, (who is engaged for the season.) | Christopher Strap, Mr. G. H. ANDREWS, (who is engaged for the season.)

PRICE OF TICKETS : ONE DOLLAR.

☞ A PLAN of the HOUSE is now ready, and seats may be secured for one or all of Mr. MACREADY'S Nights.

☞ DOORS open at half-past 6 o'clock. To commence at half-past 7 o'clock.

From Tappy's Printing House.

Playbill of Macready's Appearance in Boston on his second American Tour

plaster of the dear old Judge by W. Story; sat and talked with her some time.

The same day Charles Eliot Norton called — he was then a young man just out of Harvard — and brought a dinner invitation from his father. Macready liked young Norton "extremely." The next day he met Dr. Holmes, "a very delightful man; he walked home with me." Macready did not act in Boston at this time, but went on to New York to begin his season, and there he writes: —

In my ruminations this morning on my contemplated change of country (dear England!) I detected most unequivocally considerations of vanity brought into the balance that I am endeavoring to adjust between the *pro* and *con* arguments on this subject. Why should I hesitate to note down in so many words the particular littleness which I found had place in my mind in its attempt to reason out this important question? Arranging in imagination our house with its little pretty furniture, small objects of art, etc. at Cambridge, a sort of apprehension came across my mind — how few there will be to see or know anything of it; in other words, how little admiration it will receive!

This is the nearest thing to a criticism of those Americans who entertained him, that Macready permitted himself, even in the privacy of his diary. He did n't find the atmosphere of Brattle Street in the 1840's quite so æsthetically warming as that of his own London. Considering how much he

might have said, the genuineness of his regard for America cannot be doubted. He was then in his fifty-sixth year, and felt his powers waning. Not a rich man, he was considering his future, and no doubt his good friends in Boston had half persuaded him that he could make almost a fresh start in their midst. But the necessity of a decision never arose, for the Astor Place riots before his tour ended sent him back to England for good.

Macready that winter again played in New Orleans, and again went north up the Mississippi, admiring the redbuds and talking with Henry Clay, who was a fellow passenger. He had met Clay on his previous tour, and records now, "He is much, much older than five years ago." He talked with Clay every chance he had, and when that hardy perennial among our presidential candidates was wearied, he read Macaulay's History and looked at the scenery. His entries in the diary are always longest when he was on the Mississippi: not even Mark Twain could have loved that river more.

At Cincinnati, early in April, there was a premonition of the coming storm, when somebody threw half the carcass of a sheep upon the stage during the performance of *Hamlet*. The Astor Place riot occurred on May ten. Macready, escaping the mob, fled at once to Boston, where his

obligations. —— At your recent
Cambridge Commencement a countryman
of mine alluding to those bonds of sympathy
by which the recollection of our common origin
the community of language, of literature and
of laws connect the liberal and enlightened
of our respective nations, observed, that I
"although a stranger in the United States, he
could not consider himself a foreigner among
you". If such were his impressions, with what
grateful pleasure, and let me truly add,
with how much pride shall I look in my own
country the story of my sojourn here, where
unfeigned kindness has encircled me with
feelings of home, nor ever suffered me to
believe myself a stranger in your land!
My professional appearances too has

Facsimile of a Portion of Macready's

been full of interest, in proving to me how widely over this vast continent the name of Shakspeare exerts its elevating influence. — And here let me be permitted, as personally interested, to notice particularly the indulgence with which on this unworthy scaffold you have been content to piece out our imperfections with your thoughts, exercising the truest veneration for our great poet in assembling — I may say crowding, to listen to his magic verse without even the accessaries and appliances usually for its illustration.

Those deficiencies, it is rumoured, are likely to be remedied by the erection of another theatre. Should one be built — it must be the earnest desire of all, who, like myself, have observed and admired those institutions, which do such credit to your city and your country, that it should be in its conduct worthy of their high character: — that it should be dedicated only to fitting and worthy purposes,

Farewell Address to his Boston Friends

friends and sympathizers rallied to him — Sumner, Felton, Prescott, Doctor Channing, Winthrop, Eliot, Mrs. Cary, Benjamin and George Curtis, Longfellow, all calling on him immediately. "Mr. Bigelow, the Mayor, called to assure me in the strongest terms that the dues of justice and of hospitality would be maintained." Benjamin Robbins Curtis helped him prepare a statement for the press. Edward Everett also came to see him, and Charles Eliot Norton. Boston was loyal to its lion; the ten days which Macready spent in the city, before his boat sailed for England, brought him back to cheerfulness, and there is a note of genuine sorrow in his diary when he records that Prescott drank a stirrup cup and clinked glasses with him, and Charles Sumner, Hillard, and George Ticknor Curtis came down with him to the boat — of sorrow, even though, after the shock of the New York riots, "I never felt such relief as in planting my feet on that vessel's deck."

So there left our shores one of the torchbearers in the Royal Line, whose mantle, inherited from Kean, was passed on to Henry Irving. He came to a crude country, intending only to make what money he could, and perhaps to see a bit of this strange New World, but he possessed the blessed faculty of meeting people halfway, and in the strange New World he found the Old World virtues

of friendship and courtesy; intelligent people everywhere made him welcome; the beauty of the natural scene enchanted him; and roaring gently in the drawing-rooms of Beacon Hill, or drinking a benignant cup of tea in Longfellow's house on Brattle Street, he could actually consider leaving his dear England for good, and moving his "little pretty furniture" to Cambridge. That, for an Englishman and in the 1840's, is — as Macready himself would never have said — "going some." Plenty of English actors have visited our shores since then and many have remained here, but none has ever been treated so roughly as Macready was by that mob on Astor Place, and none has more tolerantly and sympathetically viewed our land, or felt more at home among the friends he made here.

SCENE V

Rachel and the Fire Engines

There may seem to be but slight connection between Rachel, the great French tragedienne, and a fire engine. None the less I am persuaded that such a connection exists, and that to point it out may be of some service even to the American theatre of to-day. An attempt to establish the connection, at any rate, will take us to an entertaining book and bring to mind once more a picturesque chapter in the annals of our playhouse.

Rachel, "sprung from the blood of Israel's scattered race," was by all accounts — including Matthew Arnold's — a supreme exponent of the heroines in classic French tragedy. She also acted *Adrienne Lecouvreur* and the plays of Victor Hugo. For many years she reigned supreme at the Théâtre Français, under a contract which she had driven the theatre to make and which gave her the lion's share of the receipts on the nights when she played, the lion's share in this case being everything. Her supremacy being unchallenged, she had the whip hand, and used it. On May 24, 1855, after Rachel had for eighteen years been the queen of tragedy in Paris, an Italian actress named

Adelaide Ristori appeared at the Italian Opera House in *Francesca da Rimini*, and the Parisian public, possibly the more readily after eighteen years of one diet, rushed with glad acclaims to worship at the feet of the visitor from beyond the Alps. Rachel, who had grown indolent of late, was waked into action, and gave in rapid succession performances of all her best rôles. But still the public lavished its praise and attention on Ristori. It does not require any great imagination to believe the statement that Rachel was piqued.

Now it so happened that Europe was still talking about the fabulous fortune Jenny Lind had accumulated by touring the barbarian New World, under the management of that super-barbarian, P. T. Barnum. Ninety-three concerts in 1850 had netted her $176,675.09, while Barnum's gross share was over $535,000. Rachel's brother, Raphael Felix, had been brooding over these succulent statistics, and he had been saying to himself, no doubt, "After all, Jenny Lind is not so great an artist as my sister." It looked like a simple matter to clear up a few million francs in America, a fair share of which would go to sister Rachel and a neat little remainder to brother Raphael. No need to bother with Barnum and split the profits.

So it was that in the early summer of 1855 Rachel, piqued by the successful challenge to her

supremacy made by Ristori, and moved, as always, by the prospect of pecuniary profit, was ready to listen to her brother's proposals. She drove a hard bargain with him. She agreed to give two hundred performances, for which she was to receive 6000 francs a performance, with all her expenses paid. 1,200,000 francs clear profit, for a year's work, was of course far in excess of anything she could have made in Paris. It was far in excess of anything she made in America, as a matter of fact. But brother Raphael was a hopeful plunger. Besides, did not Jenny Lind in less than one hundred performances take in more than 3,000,000 francs? Assembling a company which included three more of his sisters and a young leading man named Léon Beauvallet, the party acted first in London, and sailed for America in August 1855, on the steamship Pacific.

On September 3, at the Metropolitan Theatre, New York, the first performance was given, in this the first tour of America by an actor speaking in an alien tongue. In a recent book about our stage by one of the younger critics, Duse's tour in 1890 is quaintly referred to as the "pioneer" visit to our shores of a foreign player — one, that is, not speaking English. Perhaps we should be grateful to any of the younger critics who will concede the existence of anything so remote even

MLLE. RACHEL

Portrait by Auguste Charpentier

as 1890. Yet this critic, we suspect, would find some entertainment and perhaps a bit of illumination in a book entitled *Rachel in the New World*, written by her leading man, Léon Beauvallet, published first in the *Figaro*, translated into English, and issued in the United States in 1856. As the work did not appear in *Figaro* until Beauvallet had returned to France, the speed with which the translation was made testifies to the interest Rachel's tour had awakened. It is a sprightly book. Beauvallet was evidently a gay and humorous dog, who never let a story spoil for want of embellishment. The value of his narrative is generally considered to lie solely in its careful tabulation of performances and receipts. The irrelevant and often irreverent anecdotes and descriptions of life in this strange land, America, are regarded as so much humorous filler for the *Figaro*. With this judgment we do not in the least concur. Taken with the grain of salt one always applies to the tales of a humorist, M. Beauvallet's remarks about America are probably a more reliable record than many a ponderous volume of carefully analyzed facts and statistics. They have an impressionistic dash about them which any writer will recognize at once as the sign of fresh, vivid, first-hand observation, and they are worth more than all the pompous dramatic criticisms of

the period in giving us a real picture of our theatre in those days.

Rachel opened in *Les Horaces*, with seats at two, three, and four dollars, with twenty-five cents additional for a reserved place. Not until the last decade have seats been more expensive. Although the theatre was full, 26,334 francs being the receipts ($5600), and yet Beauvallet sadly points out that Jenny Lind, at her first concert in Castle Garden, took in 93,786 francs. It does not occur to him, however, to connect Barnum with that phenomenon.

Describing the opening performance, he writes:—

The public listen religiously to the Alexandrines of Corneille. The most complete silence reigns in the house.

Suddenly a strange, unexpected noise drowns the voices of the actors.

One would say that a frightful storm had come on, and that the rain was furiously beating against all the windows of the house.

Nothing of the kind! The deluge is all in your eye. The noise is produced merely by innumerable pamphlet copies of *Les Horaces*, translated into English, and all the spectators are turning over the leaf together.

Nothing can be so diverting as the perfect concert in which all these old papers are hustled.

You would say that a regiment in black uniform was executing a military order.

Mlle. Rachel does not think this so very diverting.

Later he says: —

The things that produced the greatest effect among us, her magnificent diction, the play of her countenance, her admirable carriage and gesture — all these are passed over nearly unnoticed.

The only things which excited real applause were the strong passages, passionate scenes, where the step becomes more animated, the gesture more lively, or the voice leaves its usual tones.

Now, that is so exactly what could be truthfully said even to-day of the average American audience sitting before a performance by foreign actors in a foreign tongue, or even before native actors speaking English, that it cannot be set down as the mere self-superior snarl of a Frenchman in the barbaric America of 1855. He adds: —

One thing is positive, and we all perceived it that night; tragedy is not the least in the world to the American taste.

It is a great deal too serious, a great deal too magisterial, and above all, a great deal too cold for them.

All these people, regular business men, — and I do not reproach them for that, — all these people, I say, are busy all day with their business, their sales, their dollars. . . and at night, if they consent to shut themselves up in a theatre, they want gay, pleasant spectacles which divert them a little and make them forget the labors of the day.

Whether or not this is the first reference in print

to that now famous American, the Tired Business Man, I cannot say. But when Beauvallet declared that tragedy is not to the American taste, because it is too magisterial and too cold, he was making a discovery that innumerable dramatists and actors have made since, and are still making. In 1923 the present writer hazarded a similar remark, and was sarcastically chidden for it by a critic of Mlle. Rachel's race — a rebuke which he is able to endure because, after all, facts are not removed by being sarcastic about them. There is n't the least doubt that Beauvallet was right when he said the American public of 1855 were not interested in Rachel's diction and were horribly bored by the Alexandrines of Corneille. They would be horribly bored to-day. As one of them, I freely admit I should be. Rachel was bringing to the New World a foreign drama and a foreign style of acting, which had no point of contact with our people. In 1923, when the Moscow Art Theatre company played in New York, the tremendous patronage they at first received, so far as it was a tribute to their art and not a fad, was not a result of increased interest in foreign styles of acting, or greater catholicity of appreciation, but was due to the fact that the Moscow players are character-actors, moving in an atmosphere of realistic representation which is familiar and pleasant to us.

RACHEL AS ADRIENNE LECOUVREUR

From the portrait by Joseph Ames privately owned

Rachel gave thirty-one performances in New York and nine in Boston. There was one more in Philadelphia and one in Charleston. Then a cold she had caught in New York developed so seriously that she had to stop playing. The total receipts for these forty-two performances were 684,033 francs. Rachel's own share was 280,000 francs, including her benefits, or about $60,000. But her cold developed rapidly into consumption, the company left her in Havana, after a few vain efforts to get on without her, and struggled back to Paris as best they could. Brother Raphael left unpaid bills behind him, and poor Rachel herself went home presently, never to act again. A year later she died. She had not made the fortune she expected in the New World; but neither can it be said that the New World, in paying almost $3500 a performance, — which on a scale of eight performances a week, would mean weekly receipts of $28,000, — was exactly lacking in appreciation, or at the least, curiosity. Any actor to-day who can draw in at the box office $3500 a night will not have to hunt long for a manager! The American public may have been bored by Corneille, — they preferred *Adrienne Lecouvreur*, with which they were familiar in English, — but they were hospitably disposed toward the strange, the foreign reputation. They still are.

And it is something to their credit that they continued to go to see Rachel, even after there had been reprinted in New York an article written by Jules Janin, in the *Journal des Débats*, called "Mademoiselle Racine, and Tragedy in the United States," which was a prolonged insult. One sentence in it we have always thought a pure gem of Parisian self-sufficiency — which is, of course, the most self-satisfied self-sufficiency in creation.

> The more difficulties she [Rachel] has to encounter in that matter-of-fact country, the more success she will meet with in one of refinement, where it is considered a triumph even to speak so correctly the only language made for a polite people.

After reading Janin's screed, you wonder a little at his audacity in using the adjective "polite."

However, you are also wondering, perhaps, just where the connection comes in between Rachel and fire engines.

In September Beauvallet wrote a long letter to the *Figaro*, describing the New World, and in it this paragraph occurred: —

> One single thing I cannot help telling you; that is, the immeasurable number of fires which take place in this capital [New York]. It is a hobby, a monomania, a furore — seven, eight, nine, ten a day! It is incredible. In fact, there are so many that in every house

they keep rope ladders and other instruments, *ad hoc.* One never goes to bed without a profound conviction that in five minutes the house will be on fire. Meanwhile, fires have passed into one of the customs of the country; it is a habit, a usage. Were there none, people would be disappointed. It is one of the most ardently desired pastimes of the lower classes. And what a tumult when a fire breaks out anywhere! They brawl! They howl! The alarm sounds, the bells ring! Really, it is something diabolical!

The *Figaro* displaying this letter in good time reached New York, and M. Beauvallet's strictures were resented. "The unpardonable sin," he says, "was declaring that fires were a favorite amusement." And to defend himself he called as witness an article contributed by a traveler to the *Indépendance Belge.* This article said: —

The pleasure of extinguishing fires ranks first among amusements in the United States. One must be in the country, and live there a long time, to form a good idea of the American fireman; of his strange passion for fire engines, which he decorates with flowers, which he embellishes in all possible fashions, and with which he often promenades for the sole pleasure of showing himself with a pretty engine.

No great festival comes off without firemen, and consequently fire engines: for firemen always take their engines with them. Companies of firemen interchange visits between cities, to show each other their engines and exchange compliments in relation to them.

This is by no means the quaint exaggeration it may sound to the young folk of to-day. Even Americans of my generation, who were small boys in the eighties, can remember the firemen's musters, when the old hand-engines were brought forth and the companies who manned them "interchanged visits," not so much, I fear, to compliment each other's equipment as to boast of their own. In the Yankee barber-shop where my hair was cut, the walls were decorated with truly superb lithographs depicting various stages of a fire, with the red-shirted firemen ardently pumping at the handles of their machines, while the red flames poured above them to the zenith. These old lithographs, by the way, now bring a high price. Charles William Eliot has recently recalled how in his early days at Harvard it was not quite respectable to play on an athletic team, but membership in the Harvard fire company, which dragged an ornate engine around Cambridge, was greatly to be desired. The passion was not confined to the "lower classes." And of course to suppose that a company of firemen, proud of their engine and their prowess at its pumps, did not welcome a chance for its practical display at a fire, is to suppose that military men do not welcome a war.

In New York City, at the time when Beauvallet

was there, and for many years before, the volunteer fire companies had played an active part, not only at fires, but in politics and other affairs — not invariably a pacific part. The Bowery B'hoys, as they were called, coming from the rougher element of the population, were ardent firemen, and ardent gangsters on occasion, the fire company composing the gang. Rivalry too was keen in the actual performance of duty, and before paying any attention to the flames, it was frequently necessary for the first company on the scene to consolidate its position near the source of water supply, lest it be driven off by the next arrival. The fighting was not confined to the fire. And it can be imagined that when the B'hoys were dragging their engine to the scene of action they did not do so in grim silence. They informed the world that they were coming. In consequence of these various facts, the fire companies of old New York were a picturesque part of its life, and a part which was constantly in the front of public consciousness.

We are now getting nearer to our point. In the year 1848 a man named Benjamin Baker, prompter at Mitchell's little theatre, the Olympic, patched together a piece which he called *New York in 1848*. Mitchell refused to produce it, so Baker put it on for his own benefit-night. This play was evidently inspired by — if not pretty

directly cribbed from — the English burletta by William Thomas Moncrieff, *Life in London, or the Day and Night Adventures of Tom and Jerry,* which was itself based on Pierce Egan's book, *Life in London.* This burletta was acted in America as early as 1823, with success. Professor Quinn in his invaluable *History of the American Drama* points out that between *Tom and Jerry* and *New York in 1848,* several plays had been produced in which firemen figured as characters, or in which the humbler life of American cities had been more or less depicted. One of these plays was undoubtedly *Fifteen Years of a New York Fireman's Life,* produced in January 1841, at Hill's Theatre, Chatham Square, and summarized for us on the playbill, here reproduced. The action, you will note, began in a barroom at Venn's, on Ann Street, and moved through Park Row to the Battery, where the fireman-hero embarked on a packet. Evidently, in those early days, when the melodrama of local life was in the experimental stage, a dash of nautical adventure was deemed necessary. So presently the scenic artist was called upon to depict a wreck on a "desolate rock — open sea." Of course our hero was rescued and returned to the Battery. Fortune and the dramatist then led him to a room in the Astor House, to the interior of the Park Theatre, and finally to the grand climax of the

PARK COMPANY

AT

HILL'S THEATRE..CHATHAM SQUARE.

FIFTEEN YEARS OF A NEW-YORK FIREMAN'S LIFE, *LST, A NEW LOCAL SKETCH ENTITLED* THE TEETOTALER

On Monday Evening, January 18th, 1841.

Will be presented an entirely new local Melo Drama, of intense interest, written for the present company at this Theatre, entitled

FIFTEEN YEARS OF A NEW-YORK FIREMAN'S LIFE!!!

With New Scenery, Dresses and Decorations The Scenery by Mr. Hilliard Act 1st in New-York, date 1825

Jacob Asten,.....[A New-York Fireman, No. 40].....Mr. HIELD | Mr. Morton,.....a deceyed Merchant.....Mr. GANN
Erasmus Goosequill.....[a Cockney, an Attorney's Clerk, a gentleman always on the *dodge*].....FISHER
Mr. Justright....(an English Attorney ... BEDFORD | Phelim McLoughlin... (a Fireman of N. Y. No. 10]....NICKENSON
Didenstein,.....an enemy to Jacob, Fireman of N. Y....CLARK | Lawyer Piker of Fulton-street.....Maclin
William Horsford, .a friend to Jacob, F. of N. Y. No. 1...ANDREWS | McNorton,..a Scotchman, F. of N. Y. No. 36....Gallot
Lawyer's Clerk,.....a .....Milot | Engineers, Firemen, &c.....Messrs. Simms, James, Brown, &c.
Mary Morton,.....daughter to Mr. Morton, betrothed to Jacob.....Mrs. MAEDER
Janet Jeremy.....a young lady fond of Goosequill and travelling.....VERNON

SCENERY, INCIDENTS, &C.

ACT 1

SCENE 1st. **Interior of a Bar Room at Vesn's, 5th District House, Ann-street.** Jovial meeting of Firemen The Song—" *Come, Firemen house! your slumbers break.* The Irishman and Scotchman, difference of opinion—generousity of Firemen. The *subscription for the distrest.* The enemy and rival.

Scene 2d. **Park Row** with a view of the **Park Theatre.** Arrival of Mr. Erasmus Goosequill—good news—sudden interruption and mysterious appearance of Miss Janet Jeremy.

Scene 3d. Street well known in New-York with Mr. Morton's house in ruins. The distrest. *Arrest for Debt!* timely arrival of Jacob Asten—all's well that ends well.

Scene 4th. Chamber at Lawyer Pike's house. Every thing arranged, good fortune, the villian foiled.

Scene 5th. View of the Battery. Staten Island. Narrows. The Packet Ship in distance. Departure for Europe. Jacob's farewell to his brother Firemen. *Huzza! they are outward bound.*

ACT SECOND—Fireman Wrecked.

Jacob Asten, ...(a shipwrecked Fireman.).....Mr. Hield
Mr. Morton,.....Gann
Didenstien,.....(a mutineer).....Clark
Erasmus Goosequill.....a very bad Sailor.....Fisher
Capt. Hi bard of the good ship Quebec.....Gallot
Mutineers,.... Messrs. James Richards, Johnson, Peters, Walters.
Mary Morton,....Mrs. Maeder | Janet Jeremy.....Mrs. Vernon

Scene 1. *Desolate Rock*—Open Sea—Wreck of the Ship Quebec, Discovery of the Mutineers Heroic conduct of Goosequill, Villiany of Didenstien Casting lots for life Generous behaviour of Jacob Asten Mary and Morton relieved from their awful Fate. The fatal Raft, loss of boats, the rising of the tide. The signal of distress, the arrival of the *Frigate Independence,*

THIRD—16 Years elapsed: New-York 1841.

Mr. Jacob Asten....returned from the East Indies....Mr. Hield
Mr. William Horsefield....a merchant of New-York....Andrews
Mr Dedenstein.....a man of Fortune,.....Clark
Erasmus Goosequill .....a married man.....Fisher
Phelim,.....a retired Fireman and porter.....Nickenson
James Louis ...a Fireman....King | Lawyer Pike.....Maclin
Waiter at the Astor House....Moffit | Jem....a nigger....Milot.
Miss Morton.....Mrs. Maeder
Mrs. Goosequill late Miss Jeremy.....Vernon
Ladies and Gentlemen at the Firemen's Ball—Messrs Maclin, King Gallot, Milot, Louis, Samuel, Bedford, Messieurs Taylor, Broadley Belange, Misses Conway, Bedford, A Bedford, Burrows &c. .

SCENERY AND INCIDENTS.

Scene 1st. A View of the Battery—Packet

Ship Independence at Anchor Arrival of Steamboat Jacob Asten's reappearance—an old friend—the recognition—a man of fortune but still a Fireman—heart rending news—departure for the Astor House.

Scene 2d.—Chamber—Difference of opinion

between Mr. & Mrs. Goosequill—the Marria,e promise—distress of Miss Morton.

Scene 3d.—A room in the Astor House.

Jacob's determination—meeting of old friends—Jacob's feeling toward's the Fire Department and description of a good Fireman

Scene 4th.—Interior of the Park Theatre

decorated for the **Firemen's Ball!** Meeting of Didenstien and Jacob. In this scene several Dances will be performed by the company.

Scene 5th—A street in New-York—The alarm of **FIRE!** the bells of the different districts—the Engine—Jacob still alive to the call of distress.

Scene last—Mary Morton's house on fire—the *ENGINES* playing Mary rescued from the Flames by Jacob Death of Didenstien and general Tableau

HORNPIPE,.....MR. KING

CRACOVIENNE A LA CERITO,.....MRS. C. HILL

To conclude with an entirely new Comic piece in one Act, written expressly for this Theatre, with new Scenery, call'ed

THE TEETOTALLER!!

Peter Proteus.....an actor.....Mr. SHIPPENDALE | Grigsby Worrett, Esq.....a retired merchant....Mr GANN
David Niagarus Drinkwater.....a member of the Teetotal Society.....CHAPMAN

In which character he will sing his famous song of "THE TEE-TO-TAL SOCIETY."

Julepo Loverum....a publican and sinner, quite his opposite....NICKERSON | Joe Demijohn, . . man of all Work....FISHER
Mrs. Drinkwater,..following the example of her husband..Mrs. Broadley | Miss Sophia Worrett, a romantic young lady..Pritchard

Mr. JONES of the Park is engaged and will shortly appear.

PRICES.—**Dress Boxes, 50 cts. Second Tier. 25 cents. Parquette 25 Cts.** each Box holding 5 persons, and can be secured at the Box Office in the morning. **Gallery,** which is most capacious, **12 1-2 Cts**
Private Boxes 3 to $5 to be had at the Box Office.
Doors open at half past 6, Curtain rises at 7 o'clock. Performance to conclude as near 11 as possible.

Playbill of "Fifteen Years of a Fireman's Life"

play: "*Act III, Scene 5:* A street in New York — The Alarm of Fire! — The bells of the different districts — The engines — Jacob still alive to the call of distress. *Scene last:* Mary Morton's house on fire — The engines playing — Mary rescued from the flames by Jacob — Death of Didenstein, and general tableau."

Here, certainly, were an evident attempt at local melodrama and an attempt to make a hero of the fireman. In default of further evidence, perhaps we are safe in assuming that the reason this play did not succeed, as *Life in New York* succeeded a few years later, is to be found in the name of the hero. Jacob! . . . With that name, you know just how he had to be acted. Jacob, in spite of the local setting, was probably the traditional stock hero of melodrama. Life had not yet really invaded the popular playhouse, though it was knocking at the door.

At any rate, Baker was not without some precedent in writing a *Tom and Jerry* in New York. But according to theatrical tradition, what he relied on to make his play popular was a character he had introduced, called "Mose the fireman," who was to be played, in his plan, by the excellent and popular comedian, F. S. Chanfrau. Baker, the story goes, had seen Chanfrau giving imitations of the Bowery B'hoys, as Warfield in later years

gave imitations of an East Side peddler and won his way to stardom. He had more faith in the actor and the part than Mitchell had. Chanfrau acted Mose at Baker's benefit, and at once became the town talk. He appeared on the stage in the "soap locks," plug hat, red shirt, and turned-up trousers of the type, with a tough swagger and a sardonically curled lip, and he helped to show the innocent visitors to town the sights which innocent visitors sometimes appear to prefer to witness. In the audience were many of the real Bowery B'hoys, rejoicing to behold themselves as hero; and of course not a soul there but could recognize the type as a part of the daily life of the city. The play ran for seventy nights, and before its run was over, Chanfrau produced another play, called *New York as It Is*, at the Chatham Theatre, in which Mose also figured. He acted in both plays every evening; the second piece was as popular as the first, and ran for forty-seven performances. It is recorded that on one evening Chanfrau not only appeared in both New York productions, but dashed over to Newark and appeared with a company there!

A Glance at New York was followed by *Mose in a Muss*, *Mose in California*, even *Mose in China*. Meanwhile, in Philadelphia, John Owens was producing *Philadelphia as It Is*, and even Boston

yielded to the popular demand and showed a local police court on the stage, while Junius Brutus Booth, Jr. at the National Theatre, played the title part in *The Fireman*, by S. D. Johnson.

The immediate cause for the success of *New York in 1848* was of course the vivid character-sketch furnished by the actor, Chanfrau. But that sketch would have been impossible without the framework of the play, crude drama as it was. Just as Mrs. Mowatt's *Fashion* three years earlier had delighted the town by putting before it something recognizably local, a satire on its social climbers, so Baker's hodgepodge of scenes and episodes put before the delighted town a recognizable picture of the humbler and rougher side of New York life. In either case, the appeal came because, as William James used to remark, "the mood of recognition is always pleasant"; because there was in these plays the vitality of all art which is shaped from and by its own environment. The vogue of Mose waned. But the interest in plays pretending, at least, to depict the local scene — and especially the humbler local scene — did not wane. Anyone who was fortunate enough to see, a generation ago, Harrigan and Hart in *The Mulligan Guards*, saw a successor to *New York in 1848;* and anyone to-day witnessing George M. Cohan in his play *The Song and Dance Man*, or

CHANFRAU AS THE POPULAR FIREMAN HERO

Frank Craven in *The First Year*, is witnessing American entertainment shaped by its environment, and giving to the public of to-day the same satisfactions which "Mose the Fireman" gave them.

Rachel discovered that tragedy, the cold, magisterial, classic drama, was not to the taste of Americans in the middle of the nineteenth century. People paid large sums to see her play it and were politely bored, while the press showered praises upon her. But it is easy to guess from contemporary records that the true and lively response of the crowd, the spontaneous response of the emotions, was to Mose. Mose and his fire engine were a part of their life. Corneille and his Alexandrines were n't. And if anybody fancies that it is very different to-day, or ever will be very different, he is nursing a delusion. *Les Horaces* is no doubt a finer play than *New York in 1848* — but not half so important in the history of the American theatre. Tchekoff's *Cherry Orchard*, so beautifully acted by the Moscow Art Theatre company, is unquestionably a finer play than *The Potters*, but not half so important in the history of the American theatre. We are still filled, as we were in 1855, with an amiable curiosity toward foreign plays and players, but now as then, what has any lasting effect on our own drama is what comes out of our own life, written in our own idiom.

There have always been two distinct currents in American play-writing. One group of authors, the more "literary," have sought to imitate European models, and their works without exception have been forgotten. The other group, generally working without any idea of creating literature, but simply to please their audiences, have kept alive in the American theatre the American scene, the American idiom, the American sense of humor; they have given us the negro minstrels, the plays of Harrigan and Hart, the broad character-sketches like Colonel Sellers and Josh Whitcomb and Nat Berry (in *Shore Acres*); they gave us the plays of Clyde Fitch a brief generation ago, and the plays of Cohan and Craven to-day: and now, as I write, they are giving us comedies and satires and even phantasies, which cut deeper and command a more serious respect. It is they, certainly, who will give us a national drama, if we are to have one. It will stem back to Mose and his fire engine — not to Rachel and Corneille.

SCENE VI

Colley Cibber as Critic

An Apology for the Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, Comedian, and late patentee of the Theatre Royal, with an Historical view of the Stage during his own Time. Written by Himself. How alluring the old title-pages were, in their meticulous fullness! I wish the particular title-page before me, yellowed with age and dampness between its battered calf-bindings, did not bear the further words: *The second edition.* To be sure, this second edition is dated MDCCXL, and the dedication is dated November 6, 1739, so it followed hard upon the heels of the first. The type has that charming quality of slight irregularity which gave to eighteenth-century printing something of the same charm possessed by eighteenth-century hand-wrought wood mouldings and trim, and the interior *s's* are, of course, like this *f*. I don't know how it is with others, but I can never read type in which the *s's* are so designed without unconsciously half pronouncing the words with an *f* sound, and this, in turn, imparts a quaint flavor to the text. It is quite illogical, I know, — silly, perhaps, — yet it does help to put me back into another atmos-

phere, another world. This old copy of Colley's immortal book has been in my library I don't know how many years, and I have never read the work in any other edition. I don't think I should want to — except in a first. Those *f's* are as necessary to my enjoyment of this text as would be powdered wigs and the old-school style of acting to a performance of *Love's Last Shift.*

I have always thought Colley's *Apology* one of the best books about acting ever written, not forgetting even Talma's *Art of the Actor.* Doctor Doran, in his *Annals of the Stage,* says that every dramatic critic ought to study it, though I suspect not many nowadays follow the doctor's advice. Neither, I suspect, do many actors study it. I should hardly expect to see it lying on a table in the Lambs' Club, at any rate. Nevertheless, the dapper and witty gentleman, when he was sixty-eight years old and had retired from the stage where he had acted for forty years, and from the management of the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, knew whereof he was talking. Writing ostensibly to give a history of the London theatre during his active lifetime in it, but, perhaps, actually rather more to gratify his vanity as a literary light and to set himself anew before the public in as amiable an aspect as possible, his comments on acting largely take form as descriptions of actual players,

such as the great Betterton. He knew them intimately, from long professional association, and if his descriptions of their excellences possibly err on the side of exaggeration, — all of us, when elderly, are prone to find vast merit in the performers of our youth! — at least the excellences he chronicles are such as he would declare fine acting should aim at. It is rather extraordinary how little of abiding value has ever been written about acting, by actors — that is, by those people who alone are fully competent to discuss it. It is apparently so instinctive an art that its practitioners are lost when they attempt critical analysis. Not so Colley Cibber. If, as Jefferson advised all actors to do, he kept his heart warm while acting, — I am not wholly sure that he did, — he certainly followed Jefferson's maxim to keep the head cool; and this cool head of his — which, incidentally, was shrewd enough to lift the London theatre out of disfavor and wreck into serene financial prosperity — alike conditioned his own performances and considered critically those of others.

Besides, he knew how to write!

Pope, of course, would deny this. That Pope made Colley the hero of the final edition of *The Dunciad*, proves however very little except Pope's own mean, snarling, envenomed disposition. Had

Pope, indeed, actually supposed Colley was a fool, it would have shown that the poet himself should have been the hero of his own dull poem. (Yes, it is a dull poem! I have just been trying to read it again, for any light it might shed on my subject, and I confess I have had to give up the task.) But Pope supposed nothing of the kind. In the first place, he had never forgiven Colley for making fun from the stage of his own one attempt at dramatic writing; much as if, in our day, some poet-dramatist should have flown into a rage at Weber and Fields for burlesquing one of his plays at the old Music Hall. In the second place, Cibber had been made poet laureate in his declining years, a post he held till his death. He was the first — and last — English actor so honored, unless we include Ben Jonson as an actor; and when we said he knew how to write, we had no reference to his birthday odes! One cannot escape a certain sympathy with Pope's scorn, upon reading them. Then, too, Colley was unquestionably vain: not bitterly and vindictively vain like Pope, but amiably vain, like — well, like a highly successful and prosperous old actor, who had been elected to White's, where he gambled with the gentility. He doubtless overdressed a bit, like the fops he had so brilliantly represented on the stage. He unquestionably philandered:

COLLEY CIBBER

Engraved by Cook from the painting by Vanloo

he would have felt that required of him, if only to keep in the fashion. Probably he boasted, and there is evidence enough that he was not above currying favor with the nobility. Nevertheless, he was Colley Cibber: a fine actor in comedy, a shrewd and successful manager, the author of brilliant plays which kept the boards over a hundred years, and, finally, the author of the inimitable *Apology*. Perhaps, at bottom, Pope's animosity was chiefly due to the fact that his own play could not keep the boards a week. The capacity of the unsuccessful playwright to nurse a grievance, even without the temperamental equipment of Pope, is sometimes astonishing.

It is only fair, however, to give Cibber's own explanation: —

> When I therefore find my Name at length in the Satyrical Works of our most celebrated living Author, I never look upon those Lines as Malice meant to me (for he knows I never provok'd it), but profit to himself: One of his points must be, to have many Readers. He considers that my Face and Name are more known than those of many thousands of more consequence in the Kingdom: That therefore, right or wrong, a Lick at the Laureat will always be a sure Bait, *ad captandum vulgus*, to catch him little Readers: And that to gratify the Unlearned, by now and then interspersing those merry Sacrifices of an old Acquaintance to their taste, is a piece of quite right Poetical Craft.

Colley Cibber's father, who rejoiced in the name of Caius Gabriel Cibber, was a native of Holstein, who came to London before the Restoration, "to follow his profession, which was that of Statuary, etc.," as his son says. Pope takes much pleasure in the fact that he was the sculptor of the two "Lunaticks" over the gates of the Bethlehem Hospital for the insane. Colley was born in London, November 6, 1671, while his father was at work on the bas-reliefs for a monument Christopher Wren was building. His mother's name was Colley, and she was English, "of a very ancient family." After the Revolution of 1688, Colley tried for preferment in the army, and then in the Church. Failing in both attempts, he sought employment in the theatre — literally "the" theatre, then, for the two companies, the King's and the Duke's, had been merged a few years previous. By dint of much persistence and by secretly understudying the leading players and standing ready in emergencies to take their rôles, he finally made a permanent place for himself and rose rapidly in public favor, especially after the production of his comedy, *Love's Last Shift*, in 1695. He himself created the part of the fop, Sir Novelty, a character not only peculiarly and cleverly adapted to his talents as an actor, but one which was new on the stage and — for that day, at least — must

have created a delightful and refreshing sense of reality, of actual character-observation.

Cibber first came into the company of the Theatre Royal in 1690, and he enumerates the following as the leading members at that time: —

Of Men	*Of Women*
Mr. Betterton,	Mrs. Betterton,
Mr. Monfort,	Mrs. Barry,
Mr. Kynaston,	Mrs. Leigh,
Mr. Sandford,	Mrs. Butler,
Mr. Nokes,	Mrs. Monfort, and
Mr. Underhil, and Mr. Leigh.	Mrs. Bracegirdle.

These actors, he says, he picks from the rest because they

> were all original Masters in their different Stile, not meer auricular Imitators of one another, which commonly is the highest Merit of the middle Rank; but Self-judges of Nature, from whose various Lights they only took their true Instruction.

He then proceeds, as a duty of history, to give an estimate and description of each one; and herein is found the meatiest part of his book for the critic of acting. It is an old man speaking, to be sure, of players all dead, save one. The great Betterton, for instance, died in 1710, thirty years before Colley wrote.

But, after all, we are less concerned now with the truth of his pictures to their model than the truth of the pictures to the best in the art of acting.

The first player whom he discusses is of course Thomas Betterton. Betterton, without question, was one of the torchbearers in the Royal Line. Born — probably in 1635 — the son of a cook to Charles I, and apprenticed as a youth to a bookseller, he had already been acting as occasion offered or could be made, for at least a year before Charles II returned to England; and in December 1661, we find him acting Hamlet at the theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields, while the rabble besieged the pit, the fops lolled in the boxes, the orange girls hawked their wares. Mr. Pepys was there, hushed to silence like the rest — even the orange girls and the fops — by his voice, and declaring: "It's the best-acted part ever done by man." A year later Pepys recorded: "Betterton is a very sober, serious man, and studious, and humble, following of his studies; and is rich already with what he gets and saves." A sober, serious, studious man, while Nell Gwyn was romping at the King's Theatre, — Betterton, before the union of the two houses, acted at the Duke of York's, under Davenant, — while the excesses of the Restoration, on the stage and off, were ripening to scandal! It is a curious contrast. Davenant, manager of the Duke's Theatre, stemmed back through the Cromwellian era to the days when Taylor acted Hamlet. He had seen Taylor act, in fact — and tradition says

Shakespeare himself taught Taylor. It is thus perfectly possible that Betterton received the torch of theatrical tradition without a break, as it is certain that he passed it on to Wilks and Booth, who passed it to Garrick, who handed it to Kean and Kemble, as they to Macready and he to Irving, and as the elder Booth, receiving it with Kean, passed it to his son. And now there is a break, threatening to become complete — "But to my purpose," as Colley says.

Betterton remained in harness until his death, which followed within forty-eight hours of his last appearance on the stage, for his own benefit, in 1710, when he acted with one gouty foot in a slipper rather than disappoint his public. The exertion was too much for him. He thus served a full half-century in the theatre, and during practically the whole of that time was the acknowledged leader of his profession. That the public remained faithful to him to the very end is a tribute alike to his art and his character, though it may be questioned if they would have done so in such degree under modern conditions. In those days, plays were acted by permanent stock-companies and the public were accustomed to see leading parts acted by the players who could best act them, not best look them. To-day we are so habituated to a strict physical correspondence between

player and part that we find it difficult to accept even our best-loved actors in any rôle not visibly corresponding in age with their actual years. Yet something of this demand for physical conformity between player and part must have existed in France in Betterton's own day, for Betterton's French rival, Michel Baron, was hissed from the stage in his latter years by a public who wished for younger blood. We have to assume that Betterton's art and personality remained potent to the end.

An actor, then, who could fascinate all England for half a century, from Pepys to Pope, who first learned his art under a man who had seen Shakespeare's players perform, must have possessed those qualities which gave life to the great drama of the Elizabethan age, and which make for greatness in any age. He must have understood and exemplified the enduring principles of acting — not alone its fashions. In the plays he acted, even in some of his own almost incredible adaptations of Shakespeare, we can see fashion at work. But in his acting, as Cibber describes it, the principles stand out. If we could see his Hamlet to-day, I fancy it would charm and thrill us as it charmed Mr. Pepys.

Thus Colley begins, with a pretty and characteristic flourish: —

THOMAS BETTERTON

Engraved by Williams from the portrait by Kneller

Betterton was a Actor, as Shakespear was an Author, both without Competitors! form'd for the mutual Assistance and Illustration of each others Genius! How Shakespear wrote, all Men who have a Taste for Nature may read and know — but with what higher Rapture would he still be read, could they conceive how Betterton play'd him! Then might they know, the one was born alone to speak what the other only knew to write! Pity it is that the momentary Beauties flowing from an harmonious Elocution cannot, like those of Poetry, be their own Record! That the animated Graces of the Player can live no longer than the instant Breath and Motion that presents them; or at best can but faintly glimmer through the Memory or imperfect Attestation of a few surviving Spectators. Could how Betterton spoke be as easily known as what he spoke — then might you see the Muse of Shakespear in her Triumph, with all her Beauties in their best Array, rising into real Life and charming her Beholders. But alas! since all this is so far out of the reach of Description, how shall I shew you Betterton? Should I therefore tell you that all the Othellos, Hamlets, Hotspurs, Mackbeths, and Brutus's whom you may have seen since his Time have fallen far short of him; this still would give you no Idea of his particular Excellence. Let us see then what a particular Comparison may do — whether that may yet draw him nearer to you.

He then takes up Betterton's Hamlet.

You have seen a Hamlet perhaps, who, on the first Appearance of his Father's Spirit, has thrown himself

into all the straining Vociferation requisite to express Rage and Fury, and the House has thunder'd with Applause; tho' the misguided Actor was all the while (as Shakespear terms it) tearing a Passion to Rags — I am the more bold to offer you this particular Instance, because the late Mr. Addison, while I sate by him to see this Scene acted, made the same Observation, asking me with some Surprize if I thought Hamlet should be in so violent a passion with the Ghost, which tho' it might have astonish'd, it had not provok'd him. For you may observe that in this beautiful Speech the Passion never rises beyond an almost breathless Astonishment, or an Impatience — limited by filial Reverence — to enquire into the suspected Wrongs that may have rais'd him from his peaceful Tomb! and a Desire to know what a Spirit, so seemingly distrest, might wish or enjoin a sorrowful Son to execute towards his future quiet in the grave.

This was the Light into which Betterton threw this scene; which he open'd with a Pause of mute Amazement! then rising slowly to a solemn, trembling Voice, he made the Ghost equally terrible to the Spectator as to himself! and in the descriptive Part of the natural Emotions which the ghastly Vision gave him, the boldness of his Expostulation was still govern'd by Decency, manly, but not braving, his Voice never rising into that seeming Outrage or wild Defiance of what he naturally rever'd. But alas! to preserve this medium between mouthing and meaning too little, to keep the Attention more pleasingly awake by a temper'd Spirit than by meer Vehemence of Voice, is of all the Master-strokes of an Actor the most difficult to reach. In this none yet have equall'd Betterton.

But I am unwilling to shew his Superiority only by recounting the Errors of those who now cannot answer to them. Let their farther Failings therefore be forgotten; or rather, shall I in some measure excuse them? For I am not yet sure that they might not be as much owing to the false Judgment of the Spectator as the Actor. While the Million are so apt to be transported, when the Drum of their Ear is so roundly rattled; while they take the Life of Elocution to lie in the Strength of the Lungs, it is no wonder the Actor, whose end is Applause, should be also tempted at this easy rate to excite it. Shall I go a little farther? and allow that this Extreme is more pardonable than its opposite Error? I mean that dangerous Affectation of the Monotone, or solemn Sameness of Pronounciation, which to my Ear is insupportable; for of all Faults that so frequently pass upon the Vulgar, that of Flatness will have the fewest Admirers. That this is an Error of ancient standing seems evident by what Hamlet says in his Instructions to the Players, *viz:* "Be not too tame, neither," &c.

The Actor, doubtless, is as strongly ty'd down to the Rules of Horace as the Writer: —

Si vis me flere, dolendum est
Primum ipsi tibi . . . .

He that feels not himself the Passion he would raise, will talk to a sleeping Audience. But this never was the fault of Betterton; and it has often amaz'd me to see those who soon came after him, throw out, in some parts of a Character, a just and graceful Spirit which Betterton himself could not but have applauded, and yet, in the equally shining Passages of the same Character, have heavily dragg'd the Sentiment along like a dead

Weight, with a long-ton'd Voice and absent Eye, as if they had fairly forgot what they were about. If you have never made this Observation, I am contented you should not know where to apply it.

"To keep the Attention more pleasingly awake by a temper'd spirit than by meer vehemence of Voice, is of all Master-strokes of an Actor the most difficult to reach." It is, surely. And Cibber lays his finger on the cause of failure: the lack of complete entrance into his part by the player. "He that feels not himself the Passion he would raise, will talk to a sleeping Audience." (Not badly put, by the way, for a dunce!) Of course, by "complete entrance into a part" it is not necessarily meant that the actor should every night feel the emotions he would raise. Probably the majority of actors, even the greatest, do not. It means, rather, that he should have felt them in preparing the rôle, and so thoroughly that he has worked out some expressive symbol for every moment he is on the stage.

Talma says that unless an actor possesses an emotional sensitiveness greater than his audience, he cannot move them deeply. The supreme actors in all generations, in all styles of drama, have possessed superior sensitiveness and consequently have filled their impersonations with shadings and subtleties and unexpected flashes that keep an

audience interested. They have not relied on vehemence of voice. In the earlier days, in America, Edwin Forrest relied on just that. He kept an audience awake by hammering home the points. In our own day, we have seen two actresses whose style might certainly be supposed to lie at the other pole from the style of Betterton, or the style of the plays Betterton acted in — Mrs. Fiske and Duse. Vehemence of voice is or was so infrequently employed by either actress as to form no part of her equipment. Yet neither ever played to a sleeping audience. Each always so thoroughly and minutely masters every shade of the emotions of her characters that she seems to live their lives. There is neither empty vehemence nor flatness. Empty vehemence results from an attempt to keep an audience awake by a show of force; flatness from an attempt at naturalism without a sufficiently sensitive identification with the character. In short, good acting is incessant and truthful impersonation. Achieve that, and the battle is mostly won.

Cibber goes on: —

> A farther Excellence in Betterton was that he could vary his Spirit to the different Characters he acted. Those wild impatient Starts, that fierce and flashing fire, which he threw into Hotspur, never came from the unruffled Temper of his Brutus (for I have more

than once seen a Brutus as warm as Hotspur). When the Betterton Brutus was provok'd in his Dispute with Cassius, his Spirit flew only to his Eye; his steady Look alone supply'd that Terror, which he disdain'd an Intemperance in his Voice should rise to. Thus, with a settled Dignity of Contempt, like an unheeding Rock, he repelled upon himself the Foam of Cassius. Perhaps the very Words of Shakespear will better let you into my Meaning: —

> Must I give way and room to your rash choler?
> Shall I be frighted when a madman stares?

And a little after: —

> There is no terror, Cassius, in your threats.

Not but in some part of this Scene, where he reproaches Cassius, his Temper is not under this Suppression, but opens into that Warmth which becomes a Man of Virtue; yet this is that Hasty Spark of Anger which Brutus himself endeavours to excuse.

Again, what is this but to say that Betterton impersonated? The "hasty spark" of anger Betterton's Brutus permitted himself reminds me, incidentally, of Mansfield's performance in this rôle. Mansfield's Brutus was keyed very low — lower even than Cibber suggests in the case of Betterton; and not until the "Away, slight man!" did the actor unloose the torrent of his power. At that spurt of flame, however, not only Cassius but you in your orchestra chair wanted to slink to safety. An actor who is all vehemence is like a newspaper which is all four-column headlines.

In the following passage from Cibber, the modern reader will perhaps feel himself in a strange world. We of to-day know little of "furious fustian and turgid rants." Yet it may be that old Colley has something to say to us, just the same.

There cannot be a stronger Proof of the Charms of harmonious Elocution, than the many, even unnatural Scenes and Flights of the false Sublime it has lifted into Applause. In what Raptures have I seen an Audience, at the furious Fustian and turgid Rants in Nat. Lee's *Alexander the Great!* For though I can allow this Play a few great Beauties, yet it is not without its extravagant Blemishes. Every Play of the same Author has more or less of them. Let me give you a Sample from this. Alexander, in a full crowd of Courtiers, without being occasionally call'd or provok'd to it, falls into this Rhapsody of Vain-glory: —

> Can none remember? Yes, I know all must!

And therefore they shall know it agen,

> When Glory, like the dazzling Eagle, stood
> Perch'd on my Beaver, in the Granic Flood,
> When Fortune's Self my Standard trembling bore,
> And the pale Fates stood frighted on the Shore,
> When the Immortals on the Billows rode,
> And I myself appear'd the leading God.

When these flowing Numbers came from the Mouth of a Betterton, the Multitude no more desired Sense to them than our musical Connoisseurs think it essential in the celebrated Airs of an Italian Opera. Does this not prove that there is very near as much Enchantment in the well-govern'd Voice of an Actor as in the sweet

Pipe of an Eunuch? If I tell you there was no one Tragedy, for many Years, more in favour with the Town than *Alexander*, to what must we impute this its command of publick Admiration? Not to its intrinsick Merit, surely, if it swarms with passages like this I have shewn you! If this Passage has Merit, let us see what Figure it would make upon Canvas, what sort of Picture would rise from it. If Le Brun, who was famous for painting the Battles of this Hero, had seen this lofty Description, what one Image could he have possibly taken from it? In what Colours would he have shewn us Glory perch'd upon a Beaver? How would he have drawn Fortune trembling? Or, indeed, what use could he have made of pale Fates, or Immortals riding upon Billows, with this blustering God of his own making at the head of them?

Where, then, must have lain the Charm, that once made the Publick so partial to this Tragedy? Why, plainly, in the Grace and Harmony of the Actor's Utterance. For the Actor himself is not accountable for the false Poetry of the Author. That, the Hearer is to judge of; if it passes upon him, the Actor can have no quarrel to it; who, if the Periods given him are round, smooth, spirited, and high-sounding, even in a false Passion, must throw out the same Fire and Grace as may be required in one justly rising from Nature; where those his Excellencies will then be only more pleasing in proportion to the Taste of his Hearer. And I am of opinion, that to the extraordinary Success of this very Play we may impute the Corruption of so many Actors and Tragick Writers as were immediately misled by it. The unskilful Actor, who imagin'd all

the Merit of delivering those blazing Rants lay only in the Strength and strain'd Exertion of the Voice, began to tear his Lungs upon every false or slight Occasion, to arrive at the same Applause. And it is from hence I date our having seen the same Reason prevalent for above fifty Years. Thus equally misguided, too, many a barren-brain'd Author has stream'd into a frothy flowing Style, pompously rolling into sounding Periods, signifying — roundly nothing; of which Number, in some of my former Labours, I am something more than suspicious that I may myself have made one. But to keep a little closer to Betterton.

When this favourite Play I am speaking of, from its being too frequently acted, was worn out and came to be deserted by the Town, upon the sudden Death of Monfort, who had play'd Alexander with Success for several Years, the Part was given to Betterton, which, under this great Disadvantage of the Satiety it had given, he immediately reviv'd with so new a Lustre that for three Days together it fill'd the House; and had his then declining Strength been equal to the Fatigue the Action gave him, it probably might have doubled its Success; an uncommon Instance of the Power and intrinsick Merit of an Actor. This I mention not only to prove what irresistible Pleasure may arise from a judicious Elocution, with scarce Sense to assist it, but to shew you too, that tho' Betterton never wanted Fire and Force when his Character demanded it, yet, where it was not demanded, he never prostituted his Power to the low Ambition of a false Applause. And further, that when, from a too advanced Age, he resigned that toilsome Part of

Alexander, the Play for many Years after never was able to impose upon the Publick; and I look upon his so particularly supporting the false Fire and Extravagancies of that Character to be a more surprizing Proof of his Skill than his being eminent in those of Shakespear; because there, Truth and Nature coming to his Assistance, he had not the same Difficulties to combat, and consequently we must be less amaz'd at his Success, where we are more able to account for it.

The modern critic or theatregoer may quite naturally look upon that passage as a suspicious defense of "elocution," as placing a false emphasis upon the mere manner of vocal delivery. But actually it is nothing of the kind, as Cibber himself is careful to explain in his reference to Shakespeare. The truth is that the drama, though it chances today to be chiefly realistic, is capable of many appeals other than that of realistic representation, and one of these appeals is the music of human speech. The moment dialogue departs from realistic representation, that moment the actor has an opportunity to supply the charm of music; indeed, that moment it is his duty to do so. A fault of the modern stage is that actors have forgotten this truth, which Cibber and Betterton knew so well. John Barrymore, getting ready to play Shakespeare, studied for nearly two years to improve and make more flexible his voice, to

JOHN BARRYMORE AS HAMLET

Photograph by Francis Bruguiere

intensify his sense of rhythm; and how much of his success as Richard III and Hamlet was due to this wise step few of his colleagues appear to realize. Even in realistic representations, the actor with a flexible voice, who can subtly, "without getting found out" (as George Arliss puts it), practise the art of elocution, of making speech musical, will somehow give more pleasure to an audience, even if the audience cannot tell you why.

The passage thus continues: —

"Notwithstanding the extraordinary Power he shew'd in blowing *Alexander* once more into a blaze of Admiration, Betterton had so just a sense of what was true or false Applause, that I have heard him say he never thought any kind of it equal to an attentive Silence; that there were many ways of deceiving an Audience into a loud one, but to keep them husht and quiet was an Applause which only Truth and Merit could arrive at: Of which Art, there never was an equal Master to himself. From these various Excellencies, he had so full a Possession of the Esteem and Regard of his Auditors, that upon his Entrance into every Scene, he seem'd to seize upon the Eyes and Ears of the Giddy and Inadvertent. To have talk'd or look'd another way would then have been thought Insensibility or Ignorance. In all his Soliloquies of moment, the strong Intelligence of his Attitude and Aspect drew you into such an impatient Gaze and eager Expectation, that you almost imbib'd the Sentiment with your Eye before the Ear could reach it.

It will have been frequently observed by all my readers that certain actors to-day have a similar power. They immediately arrest the attention when they enter the scene, and their audience is frequently one jump ahead of their spoken words, in grasping their meaning. The power to arrest the attention belongs, of course, to the actor with a strong personality, who has combined it thoroughly with his rôle; but the second ability, that of indicating to an audience your emotion ahead of the spoken word, is chiefly technical. It is a matter of facial expression more than anything else, though other factors enter. Study the acting of Frank Craven to-day, and you will see it excellently illustrated. It is infrequently possessed by even the most gifted amateurs, but is the result of long and careful training.

Colley continues, in his description of Betterton, to discuss the mysteries of acting: —

As Betterton is the Centre to which all my Observations upon Action tend, you will give me leave, under his Character, to enlarge upon that Head. In the just Delivery of Poetical Numbers, particularly where the Sentiments are pathetick, it is scarce credible upon how minute an Article of Sound depends their greatest Beauty or Inaffection. The Voice of a Singer is not more strictly ty'd to Time and Tune than that of an Actor in Theatrical Elocution: The least Syllable too long, or too slightly dwelt upon in a Period, depreciates

it to nothing; which very syllable if rightly touch'd, shall, like the heightening Stroke of Light from a Master's Pencil, give Life and Spirit to the whole. I never heard a Line in Tragedy come from Betterton wherein my Judgment, my Ear, and my Imagination were not fully satisfy'd; which, since his Time, I cannot equally say of any one Actor whatsoever. Not but it is possible to be much his Inferior, with great Excellencies, which I shall observe in another Place. Had it been practicable to have ty'd down the clattering Hands of all the ill judges who were commonly the Majority of an Audience, to what amazing Perfection might the English Theatre have arrived, with so just an Actor as Betterton at the Head of it! If what was Truth only, could have been applauded, how many noisy Actors had shook their Plumes with shame, who, from the injudicious Approbation of the Multitude, have bawl'd and strutted in the place of Merit?

It is not to the Actor therefore, but to the vitiated and low Taste of the Spectator, that the Corruptions of the Stage (of what kind soever) have been owing. If the Publick, by whom they must live, had Spirit enough to discountenance and declare against all the Trash and Fopperies they have been so frequently fond of, both the Actors and the Authors, to the best of their Power, must naturally have serv'd their daily Table with Sound and Wholesome Diet. — But I have not yet done with my artical of Elocution.

As we have sometimes great Composers of Musick who cannot sing, we have as frequently great Writers that cannot read; and though without the nicest Ear no Man can be Master of Poetical Numbers, yet the

best Ear in the World will not always enable him to pronounce them. Of this truth Dryden, our first great Master of Verse and Harmony, was a strong Instance: When he brought his Play of *Amphytrion* to the Stage, I heard him give it his first Reading to the Actors, in which, though it is true he deliver'd the plain Sense of every Period, yet the whole was in so cold, so flat, and unaffecting a manner, that I am afraid of not being believ'd when I affirm it.

On the contrary, Lee, far his Inferior in Poetry, was so pathetick a Reader of his own Scenes, that I have been informed by an Actor who was present, that while Lee was reading to Major Mohun at a Rehearsal, Mohun, in the Warmth of his Admiration, threw down his Part and said — Unless I were able to play it as well as you read it, to what purpose should I undertake it? And yet this very Author, whose Elocution raised such Admiration in so capital an Actor, when he attempted to be an Actor himself soon quitted the Stage, in an honest Despair of ever making any profitable Figure there. From all this I would infer, that, let our Conception of what we are to speak be ever so just, and the ear ever so true, yet, when we are to deliver it to an Audience (I will leave Fear out of the question), there must go along with the whole a natural Freedom and becoming Grace, which is easier to conceive than to describe: For without this inexpressible Somewhat, the Performance will come out oddly disguis'd, or somewhere defectively, unsurprizing to the Hearer. Of this Defect too, I will give you yet a stranger Instance, which you will allow Fear could not be the Occasion of. If you remember Estcourt, you must

have known that he was long enough upon the Stage not to be under the least Restraint from Fear in his Performance. This Man was so amazing and extraordinary a Mimick that no Man or Woman, from the Coquette to the Privy-Counsellor, ever mov'd or spoke before him but he could carry their Voice, Look, Mien, and Motion, instantly into another Company. I have heard him make long Harangues and form various Arguments, even in the manner of thinking, of an eminent Pleader at the Bar, with every the least Article and Singularity of his Utterance so perfectly imitated that he was the very *alter ipse*, scarce to be distinguished from his Original. Yet more; I have seen upon the Margin of the written Part of Falstaff, which he acted, his own Notes and Observations upon almost every speech of it, describing the true Spirit of the Humour, and with what Tone of Voice, Look, and Gesture, each of them ought to be delivered. Yet in his Execution upon the Stage he seemed to have lost all those just Ideas he had form'd of it, and almost thro' the Character, labour'd under a heavy Load of Flatness. In a word, with all his Skill in Mimickry and knowledge of what ought to be done, he never, upon the Stage, could bring it truly into Practice, but was upon the whole a languid, unaffecting Actor.

After I have shewn you so many necessary qualifications, not one of which can be spared in true Theatrical Elocution, and have at the same time proved that, with the Assistance of them all united, the whole may still come forth defective, what Talents shall we say will infallibly form an Actor? This, I confess, is one of Nature's Secrets, too deep for me to dive into;

let us content our selves therefore with affirming that Genius, which Nature only gives, only can complete him. This Genius then was so strong in Betterton that it shone out in every Speech and Motion of him. Yet Voice and Person are such necessary Supports to it, that, by the Multitude, they have been preferr'd to Genius itself or at least often mistaken for it. Betterton had a Voice of that kind which gave more Spirit to Terror than to the softer Passions; of more Strength than Melody. The Rage and Jealousy of Othello became him better than the Sighs and Tenderness of Castalio: For though in Castalio he only excell'd others, in Othello he excell'd himself.

In our own day, we have seen at least one example of a marvelous mimic who was a "languid, unaffected actor" — or rather actress. The just elocution which Cibber speaks of, no less than the representation of character, must come from emotional and æsthetic sensitiveness, not from powers of mimicry. The mimetic faculty, indeed — which laymen often think of as the basis of an actor's equipment — is actually not a necessary part of his equipment at all. Many, if not most, of the finest actors do not possess it. Any actor, of course, will admit as much. But by no means every actor — or critic — realizes that "the least syllable too long, or too slightly dwelt upon in a period, depreciates it to nothing." Mrs. Fiske once told me that she could turn any of her parts

to burlesque by prolonging, or clipping, or slightly shifting the emphasis; and, indeed, she did almost just that when she played Lady Patricia, burlesquing her own style. True even in realistic drama, the exact balance of the vocal elements called for by poetic or romantic drama makes the need of elocutionary skill, of a just and sensitive ear, all the greater. It is only a very young or a very ignorant person who laughs even to-day at the idea of "elocution" on the stage. And probably it is only an actor who has played Hamlet or some other great rôle for twenty years, still finding his ear at times unsatisfied, still finding shades of emphasis or emotion escaping him, who fully realizes the difficulties of his art, or perhaps the greatness of Betterton. Talma did. He said no actor could play a part perfectly, short of twenty years.

Colley concludes his description of Betterton with a note on his personal appearance.

The Person of the excellent Actor was suitable to his Voice, more manly than sweet, not exceeding the middle Stature, inclining to the corpulent; of a serious and penetrating Aspect; his Limbs nearer the athletick than the delicate proportion; yet however form'd, there arose from the Harmony of the whole a commanding Mien of Majesty which the fairer-fac'd, or (as Shakespear calls 'em) the curled Darlings of his Time, ever wanted something to be equal Masters of. There was some Years ago to be had, almost in every

Print-shop, a Mezzotinto from Kneller, extremely like him.

In his account of poor Will Mountfort — whose name he spells "Monfort" — Cibber excellently separates the respective shares of natural personality and calculated art in an actor's performance — something not at all easy to do, as any practised critic will testify, and something the general public seldom makes any attempt to do. Mountfort was a tall, graceful man, who excelled as the stage lover and "gave the truest Life to what we call the Fine Gentleman." In 1692, when he was but thirty-three, he came to the aid of Mrs. Bracegirdle, whom Lord Mohun and a Captain Richard Hill were trying to abduct in a carriage. The effort had failed before his arrival, but he evidently spoke his mind, particularly regarding Captain Hill, and that officer ran him through. Hill fled from England, and Lord Mohun — who had already been acquitted of one murder, on his promise to behave in future — was tried for this one and again acquitted. He came to a bloody end in his famous duel in Hyde Park with the Duke of Hamilton. Cibber, therefore, was but two years in the company with Mountfort.

He had a particular Talent [says Colley] in giving Life to bons Mots and Repartees: The Wit of the Poet seem'd always to come from him extempore, and sharp-

en'd into more Wit from his brilliant manner of delivering it. He had himself a good Share of it, or what is equal to it, so lively a Pleasantness of Humour, that, when either of these fell into his Hands upon the Stage, he wantoned with them to the highest Delight of his Auditors. The agreeable was so natural to him, that even in that dissolute Character of the Rover he seem'd to wash off the Guilt from Vice and gave it Charms and Merit. For tho' it may be a Reproach to the Poet to draw such Characters not only unpunish'd but rewarded, the Actor may still be allow'd his due Praise in his excellent Performance. And this is a distinction which, when this Comedy was acted at Whitehall, King William's Queen Mary was pleas'd to make in favour of Monfort, notwithstanding her Disapprobation of the Play.

He had, besides all this, a Variety in his Genius, which few capital Actors have shewn, or perhaps have thought it any Addition to their Merit to arrive at. He could entirely change himself; could at once throw off the Man of Sense for the brisk, vain, rude, and lively Coxcomb, the false, flashy, Pretender to Wit, and the Dupe of his own Sufficiency. Of this he gave a delightful Instance in the Character of Sparkish in Wycherly's *Country Wife*. In that of Sir Courtly Nice his Excellence was still greater: there his whole Man, Voice, Mien, and Gesture, was no longer Monfort but another Person. There the insipid, soft Civility, the elegant, and formal Mien, the drawling Delicacy of Voice, the stately Flatness of his Address, and the empty Eminence of his Attitudes were so nicely conserv'd and guarded by him, that had he not been an entire

Master of Nature, had he not kept his Judgment, as it were, a Centinel upon himself, not to admit the least Likeness of what he us'd to be to enter into any Part of his Performance — he could not possibly have so completely finish'd it.

He "wantoned" with wit on the stage, because he had "so lively a Pleasantness of Humour" in his own person, to the vast delight of his audience. But when he played a part in which there was no wit to be wantoned with, "he kept his judgment, as it were, a sentinel upon himself." Had Mountfort lived to-day, it is much to be feared that he would have been kept perpetually in rôles where he could wanton with such wit as the authors could provide, perpetually capitalizing his personality and in the end failing to get his just dues from the critical, who would declare that he "always played himself" — as they have done for years when John Drew appeared.

In Cibber's description of the comedian, James Nokes, we recognize at once a type of actor who is always popular, always successful, so long as he sticks to his last, and who gives, after all, a vast amount of innocent pleasure to the world — the natural-born entertainer. Old Sol Smith, in America, was undoubtedly such a man. So was Peter Dailey at the Weber and Fields Music Hall. So, in their degree and kind, are William Collier

and Raymond Hitchcock to-day, and Al Jolson and Frank Tinney.

Nokes was an actor [says Colley] of a quite different Genius from any I have ever read, heard of, or seen, since or before his Time; and yet his general excellence may be comprehended in one Article, *viz.* a plain and palpable Simplicity of Nature, which was so utterly his own, that he was often as unaccountably diverting in his common Speech as on the Stage. I saw him once, giving an Account of some Table-talk, to another Actor behind the Scenes, which a Man of Quality accidentally listening to, was so deceived by his Manner that he ask'd him if that was a new Play he was rehearsing. It seems almost amazing that this Simplicity, so easy to Nokes, should never be caught by any one of his Successors. Leigh and Underhil have been well copied tho' not equall'd by others. But not all the mimical Skill of Estcourt (fam'd as he was for it), tho' he had often seen Nokes could scarce give us an Idea of him. After this perhaps it will be saying less of him, when I own that though I have still the Sound of every Line he spoke, in my Ear (which us'd not to be thought a bad one), yet I have often try'd by myself, but in vain, to reach the least distant Likeness of the *Vis Comica* of Nokes. Though this may seem little to his Praise, it may be negatively saying a good deal to it, because I have never seen any one Actor, except himself, whom I could not at least so far imitate as to give you a more than tolerable Notion of his manner. But Nokes was so singular a Species and was so form'd by Nature for the Stage, that I question if

(beyond the trouble of getting Words by Heart) it ever cost him an Hour's Labour to arrive at that high Reputation he had, and deserved. . . .

He scarce ever made his first Entrance in a Play but he was received with an involuntary Applause, not of Hands only, for those may be and have often been partially prostituted and bespoken; but by a General Laughter, which the very Sight of him provoked and Nature cou'd not resist; yet the louder the Laugh, the graver was his Look upon it; and sure, the ridiculous Solemnity of his Features were enough to have set a whole Bench of Bishops into a Titter, cou'd he have been honour'd (may it be no Offence to suppose it) with such grave and right reverend Auditors. In the ludicrous Distresses, which, by the Laws of Comedy, Folly is often involv'd in, he sunk into such a mixture of piteous Pusillanimity and a Consternation so rufully ridiculous and inconsolable, that when he had shook you to a Fatigue of Laughter, it became a moot point, whether you ought not to have pity'd him.

When he debated any matter by himself, he would shut up his Mouth with a dumb studious Powt, and roll his full Eye into such a vacant Amazement, such a palpable Ignorance of what to think of it, that his silent Perplexity (which would sometimes hold him several Minutes) gave your Imagination as full Content as the most absurd thing he could say upon it. In the Character of Sir Martin Marr-all, who is always committing Blunders to the Prejudice of his own Interest, when he had brought himself to a Dilemma in his Affairs by vainly proceeding upon his own Head, and was, afterwards, afraid to look his governing Servant

and Counsellor in the Face; what a copious and distressful Harangue have I seen him make with his Looks (while the House has been in one continued Roar, for several minutes) before he could prevail with his Courage to speak a Word to him! Then might you have at once read in his Face Vexation — that his own Measures, which he had piqued himself upon, had fail'd; Envy — of his Servant's superior Wit; Distress — to retrieve the Occasion he had lost; Shame — to confess his Folly; and yet a sullen Desire to be reconciled and better advised, for the future! What Tragedy ever shew'd us such a Tumult of Passions rising at once in one Bosom! or what Buskin'd Heroe, standing under the Load of them, could have more effectually mov'd his Spectators by the most pathetick Speech, than poor miserable Nokes did by this silent Eloquence and piteous Plight of his Features?

There are in every generation such favored souls — usually if not almost invariably, be it noted, in low comedy. They have an instinct of observation which keeps their representations within the bounds of truth: very often, indeed, an instinct of burlesque which points their representations into delightful caricature. But behind all else is the pure gift of personality, the magic power to entertain, which makes their impersonations effortless, and carries their impersonating into their daily speech and intercourse. They cannot tell a story, at lunch, without making a play of it. The ordinary theatregoer, of course, has no interest in the

process whereby he is made to laugh; he is interested only in results. But the more critical and curious will always find in such an actor as Nokes a fascinating study in the mysterious sources of entertainment, the complications brought about in so personal an art as that of acting by the human equation. The testimony of Cibber that it never cost Nokes an hour's labor to arrive at his high reputation is a vital bit of evidence. Such players are generally limited to what we may call their natural range, and when they attempt to go beyond it they fail for want of the power of effort. When one of them, however, does combine with this natural gift of entertaining a power of sustained effort, together with imagination and artistic intelligence, the result may be memorable — personality guided and uplifted by art, and art saturated with the delightful personality. Such a union, surely, was Jefferson's Rip.

I am not quite sure, either, that Colley is right when he implies that, because Nokes did not have to work over his parts, therefore his effects came from on high. The description of what he did with his comical face, how much he expressed with it, causing the audience to rock with mirth and yet to sense a hint of pathos, reminds one surely of Charlie Chaplin in the movies, or of Frank Craven in *Bought and Paid For*, or the elder

Sothern as Lord Dundreary, at that moment when all his faculties, one by one, withdrew from contact with the outer world and concentrated on a frantic search for something in his pockets. No doubt the player must be a richly unctuous and comic fellow to move an audience thus; but to express by face and body these various emotions, and to do it with such unerring clarity, requires a concentration of purpose and a command of technical resources, native or acquired, of no mean order. Whether in the seeming artlessness of Nokes, or of an Al Jolson joshing with the band-leader, or of a Charlie Chaplin toying with a mud puddle, there is always the definite employment of technical skill, no less than in an impersonation by Sothern or Frank Craven. And I very much doubt if even Nokes was as successful on his first appearance as he was ten years later, when practice had shown him how to control even his most instinctive effects.

In discussing the women of the company, though all but one of them were dead, Colley is gallant — but at times pungently truthful. Perhaps what is at once the paradox and the tragedy of the woman player was never put better into words than in his estimate of Mrs. Barry, the heroine of so many of Dryden's plays, and of whom Dryden said, in his preface to *Cleomenes*, "Mrs.

Barry, always excellent, has in this tragedy excelled herself, and gained a reputation beyond any woman I have ever seen in the theatre."

I very perfectly remember her acting that Part, [says Colley] and however unnecessary it may seem to give my Judgment after Dryden's, I cannot help saying, I do not only close with his Opinion, but will venture to add, that (tho' Dryden has been dead these Thirty-eight Years) the same Compliment to this Hour may be due to her Excellence. And tho' she was then not a little past her Youth, she was not till that time fully arriv'd to her maturity of Power and Judgment: From whence I would observe, That the short Life of Beauty is not long enough to form a complete Actress. In Men the Delicacy of Person is not so absolutely necessary, nor the Decline of it so soon taken notice of.

"The short life of beauty is not long enough to form a complete actress." Yet Juliet, who must rise to the heights of tragic passion and despair, is supposed to be a miss in her teens! Not many years ago Mrs. Patrick Campbell came to America as the heroine of Shaw's *Pygmalion*, playing the cockney girl whom the odd scientist converts into a "lady." Her performance of this difficult rôle was a rare delight to lovers of acting, incomparably superior to any performance which could have been given by an actress actually nineteen, or even by one who could have made herself look

ELIZABETH BARRY

Engraved by Knight from the portrait by Kneller

nineteen. Yet the public, knowing Mrs. Campbell's age, seeing her as a mature woman, would not and could not make the allowance, though other allowances, seemingly equally difficult, convention has taught us to make in the theatre every night. The short life of beauty, every actress knows she must make the most of, for few indeed are those who develop into fine enough artists to hold a foremost place when it is gone. Talma, as we have noted, said it took at least twenty years of practice to perfect a player in a tragic rôle, so that he could repeat it night after night as it should be played, in every detail. But no actress faces forty with pleasure, however near perfection she has brought her art.

Miss Jane Cowl, in 1923, at last played Juliet, after many years of practice in less exacting parts; and the triumph of her impersonation was that she brought to it an aspect and an air still convincingly virginal and girlish, while also bringing to it a matured technique and emotional power. She did not, as William Winter once said of a popular young actress who essayed the rôle, "bleat like a sheep" in the potion scene. But Miss Cowl is an exception. It is a weakness of our American theatre that we insist on convincing youth in actresses in preference to convincing power. We forgive incompetence far quicker than a wrinkle.

The case of Mrs. Bracegirdle, as set forth by Cibber, may throw some light on the situation.

I come now to the last, and only living Person, of all those whose Theatrical Characters I have promised you — Mrs. Bracegirdle, who, I know, would rather pass her remaining Days forgotten as an Actress than to have her Youth recollected in the most favorable Light I am able to place it; yet, as she is essentially necessary to my Theatrical History, and as I only bring her back to the Company of those with whom she passed the Spring and Summer of her Life, I hope it will excuse the Liberty I take, in commemorating the Delight which the Publick received from her Appearance, while she was an Ornament to the Theatre.

Mrs. Bracegirdle was now but just blooming to her Maturity, her Reputation as an Actress gradually rising with that of her Person; never any woman was in such general Favour of her Spectators, which, to the last Scene of her Dramatick Life, she maintain'd, by not being unguarded in her private Character. This Discretion contributed not a little to make her the *Cara*, the Darling, of the Theatre. For it will be no extravagant thing to say, Scarce an Audience saw her that were less than half of them Lovers, without a suspected Favourite among them. And tho' she might be said to have been the Universal Passion and under the highest Temptations, her Constancy in resisting them served but to increase the number of her Admirers. And this perhaps you will more easily believe, when I extend not my Encomiums on her Person beyond a Sincerity that can be suspected; for

she had no greater Claim to Beauty than what the most desirable Brunette might pretend to. But her Youth and lively Aspect threw out such a Glow of Health and Chearfulness, that, on the Stage, few Spectators that were not past it could behold her without Desire. It was even a Fashion among the Gay and Young to have a Taste or *Tendre* for Mrs. Bracegirdle. She inspired the best Authors to write for her, and two of them, when they gave her a Lover in a Play, seem'd palpably to plead their own Passions and make their private Court to her in fictitious Characters. In all the chief Parts she acted, the Desirable was so predominant that no Judge could be cold enough to consider from what other particular Excellence she became delightful.

To speak critically of an Actress that was extremely good, were as hazardous as to be positive in one's Opinion of the best Opera Singer. People often judge by Comparison, where there is no Similitude in the Performance. So that, in this case, we have only Taste to appeal to, and of Taste there can be no disputing. I shall therefore only say of Mrs. Bracegirdle, That the most eminent Authors always chose her for their favourite Character, and shall leave that uncontestable Proof of her Merit to its own Value. Yet, let me say, there were two very different Characters in which she acquitted herself with uncommon Applause: If any thing could excuse that desperate Extravagance of Love, that almost frantick Passion of Lee's *Alexander the Great*, it must have been, when Mrs. Bracegirdle was his Statira; as when she acted Millamant, all the Faults, Follies, and Affectation of

that agreeable Tyrant were venially melted down into so many Charms and Attractions of a conscious Beauty. In other Characters, where singing was a necessary Part of them, her Voice and Action gave a Pleasure which good Sense, in those Days, was not asham'd to give Praise to.

She retir'd from the Stage in the Height of her Favour from the Publick, when most of her Contemporaries whom she had been bred up with were declining, in the Year 1710; nor could she be persuaded to return to it under new Masters, upon the most advantageous Terms that were offered her; excepting one day, about a Year after, to assist her good Friend, Mr. Betterton, when she played Angelica, in *Love for Love*, for his Benefit. She has still the Happiness to retain her usual Chearfulness, and to be, without the transitory Charm of Youth, agreeable.

We may pass over as a mere matter of historical curiosity the assurances he gives us of the lady's circumspect private life. In the theatre of the Restoration an actress of unblemished private character was a target for remark. What Cibber makes evident here is that Mrs. Bracegirdle's appeal was at least as much sexual as it was artistic, that she gave a supreme performance as Statira because of her sex fascination. As Millamant, in Congreve's *Way of the World*, he confesses again to the same thing, when he says, "all the Faults, Follies and Affectations of that agreeable Tyrant were venially melted down into so many

Anne Bracegirdle in "The Empress of China"

Charms." Mrs. Bracegirdle began to act in 1680. Her last appearance was at Betterton's fatal benefit in 1710, though she had actually retired from the stage some months before. Meantime, Mrs. Oldfield had appeared on the scene — and that was the elder woman's tragedy. It is the perpetual tragedy of the actress, who is doomed to be measured so largely in the theatre by her sex appeal, and so seldom gains her rightful rewards by the achievement of a perfected art after youth and beauty are gone.

Of the many gossipy tales of Mrs. Bracegirdle to illustrate her blameless life, — or, sometimes, to cast dark doubts upon, as being quite too unbelievable, — Walpole records perhaps the best. "One day," he says, "Lord Burlington, who had long and vainly loved her, sent her a present of some fine old china. She told the servant that he had made a mistake; that it was true the letter was for her, but the china for his lady, to whom he must carry it. Lord! the countess was so full of gratitude when her husband came home to dinner!"

It almost seems to us that there is a comedy waiting to be written, with Mrs. Bracegirdle as the heroine — and whom to play the part? Ellen Terry in her youth; oh, yes, always Ellen Terry — in her youth! A comedy, did we say?

Mrs. Oldfield joined the company in 1699, but it was not till 1703 that Cibber recognized any merit in her — which may not have been surprising, as she was still in her teens. She then filled in for another actress in a leading part, and delighted him. He immediately took up the incompleted manuscript of *The Careless Husband* and finished it, writing the character of Lady Betty Modish with the young actress in mind. In this play, in 1704, she made her first triumph. "After her Success in this Character of higher Life," he records, "all that Nature had given her of the Actress seem'd to have risen to its full Perfection. But the Variety of her Power could not be known 'till she was seen in variety of Characters; which, as fast as they fell to her, she equally excell'd in." He further records that, "in the wearing of her Person she was particularly fortunate; her Figure was always improving, to her Thirty-sixth Year." She constantly strove, also, to improve her acting, never scorning to ask and take advice. In short, she appears to have been one of those players who mature slowly, who need success to bring out even their physical attractiveness, and who grow in grace as they grow in power. It is, after all, only power, emotional and intellectual, that can save the actress from her fate when youth and youth's allurement go.

Mrs. Oldfield died in 1730 at the age of forty-seven, and so popular was she still that her body lay in state in the Jerusalem Chamber, clad in "a Holland nightdress, with tucker and double ruffles of Brussels lace — of which latter material she also wore a headdress — and a pair of new kid gloves." Thousands came to view, moved, Doctor Doran assures us, by sorrow for the loss of their favorite, though the costume suggests that curiosity may have played its part. She had, in her thirty-one years on the stage, created sixty-five leading parts, some of them in tragedy, though she excelled in the heroines of "polite comedy." She was the original Marcia in Addison's *Cato*, and was referred to by Swift, who attended a rehearsal and was vexed at her levity thereat, as "the drab that played Cato's daughter." Her private life was early-eighteenth-century. But on the stage it is evident that her art was great, and her physical charm, her sex appeal, was made rather its servant than its mistress, so that in later years, when actual youth was gone, she could substitute the charm of a graceful and assured maturity, that had not lost its beauty, because it had not lost its zest and high spirits and forward vision.

It would be easy to go on through Colley's sprightly book, culling passages here and there which throw sudden lights upon the actor's art,

particularly when he speaks of Booth and Wilks, Betterton's successors and Garrick's forerunners. But we prefer now to leave that task for the reader to perform for himself; and Colley we will leave peacefully asleep in Westminster Abbey, whither he was carried in 1757, from his house in Berkeley Square, after eighty-six years of life, half of them spent in the English theatre, and for the theatre's good. That side of his life, at any rate, called for no apology.

The apology is due from Alexander Pope.

SCENE VII

Our Comedy of Bad Manners

The other day Mr. Heywood Broun, one of the most tolerant and genial of our dramatic critics, complained with some bitterness of the manners of present-day audiences in the theatre. His chief charge against them seemed to be that so many people indulge in conversation while the play is in progress, and specifically, that a certain type of theatregoer finds an unaccountable added pleasure in repeating to his — or her — companion what has just been spoken by the actors, or in commenting upon it. I think perhaps Mr. Broun is a little unfortunate in the night he is obliged to choose for play attendance; he is forced to go to the opening performance, and sit amid those odd people who are the camp followers of the art of the theatre, wise with a gossipy sophistication, yet strangely ignorant and childlike, who are always at a first night and seldom at any other. Later audiences, of which you and I form a part, are generally more humbly quiet before a masterpiece, and more inclined to keep their opinions to themselves if they do not find it quite that.

At any rate, if our ancestors of a hundred years

ago should revisit this scene, the taxicab in which we took them to the playhouse would hardly astonish them so much as the decency and decorum of the audiences. As each generation moves toward the sere and yellow, it celebrates that melancholy progression by complaining of the decline of manners, especially in the young people of the rising generation. Three things there be which never are what they once were — manners, actors, and liquors. So far as the last are concerned, the older generation of to-day has the best of the argument. So far as the second are concerned, there is room, certainly, for a reasonable doubt. But when it comes to manners, the old timers have n't a leg to stand on — not manners, that is, in public places, especially the theatre. The early American theatre may or may not have had giants on its stage; it certainly had hooligans and harlots in its audience, and the rank and file of theatregoers expressed their approval or their disapproval in ways that would have given Mr. Broun much pain.

In the year 1810 a monthly magazine called *The Mirror of Taste and Dramatic Censor* was started in Philadelphia, at a subscription price of eight dollars a year. It was rather surprisingly well written, and devoted no larger portion of its space to things English than you would suppose likely from other American publications of the

THE PHILADELPHIA THEATRE IN CHESTNUT STREET

From a contemporary print

time. It reviewed each month the productions at the local theatre, at length and intelligently. The managers of this theatre were Wood and Warren, the latter being the father of William Warren, of Boston Museum fame, and the playhouse was, of course, one of the leading theatrical institutions of America. Cooper came there to play, and Cooke, and Master Payne, in the two brief years of the magazine's struggle for existence. Their performances were described and analyzed, there were contributed articles about the theatre in Baltimore, many references to New York, and an account of the disastrous theatre fire in Richmond, in which seventy-two people were killed. Altogether, the twenty-four issues of *The Mirror of Taste* are of no slight value to a student of our stage. My own copies are from the library of William E. Burton — which does not make me think any the less of them.

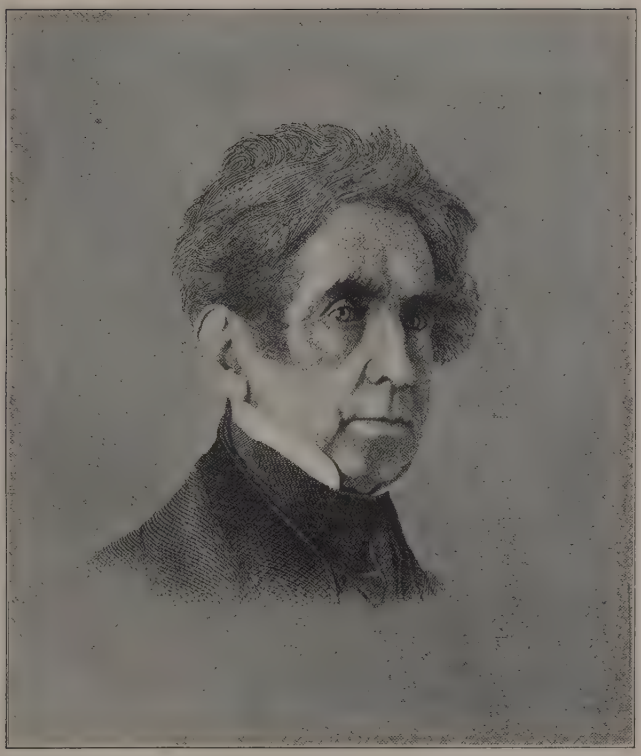
In nothing, however, is *The Mirror of Taste* more informative than in its correspondence department. People infrequently write letters to the press to express what they consider proper sentiments. They write to air grievances. And in the very first issue of the magazine were printed three letters, all inspired by the same cause. I reprint them here in the hope that they may reach the eye of Mr. Broun, and bring some balm to

his vexed spirit. The first is more vigorous than grammatical.

SIRS: —

From what I can learn about your intended publication I like the idea, and I have no doubt it may be of great use. I have often said that such a thing was much wanting, for I look upon a playhouse to be a very good thing, often keeping young men from worse places and young women from worse employment. But if our playhouse goes on as it does, it will soon be a worse place to go to than any I allude to. Last evening I brought my family to see the play and I assure you I often wished we were away again, the scandalous talk in the galleries was so bad. The noise was so great that there was no hearing anything else. The players' voices were ten or a dozen times interrupted so that they could not be heard, and two or three fellows in the gallery were particularly scandalous. Above all the rest there was one, a finished vagabond, who spoke smut and roared it out loud, directing it to the ladies in the boxes. If any of you was there, gentlemen, you must have noticed it. If not I cant write such filthy words as was spoken the whole evening. My wife begged me to come away on our little girl's account who was with us. It is not the players you ought to criticise, they behave themselves — but it is those vagabonds that think they have a right to disturb the house because they pay their half dollar apiece. I think it your duty to take note of this, and I beg you will. A CITIZEN

N.B. They in the pit was bad enough, and so was some in the boxes.



WILLIAM B. WOOD

Engraved by A. W. Graham from a daguerreotype by M. P. Simons

This is not the lone complaint of one citizen. Another letter follows, which says: —

Our theatre has sunk to the worst state imaginable of licentiousness and savage riot. . . . While we hold ourselves so proudly to the world, what must those foreigners think of us who visit our theatre? From a place of rational recreation and improvement, it has become a mere bear garden. The play is interrupted and all enjoyment, save that of rioting and brawling, killed in various ways. The very boxes themselves are no sanctuary from ruffianish incivility; while the ears are stunned and the cheek of Decency crimsoned with the profaneness, obscenity, and senseless brawl of barbarians in the gallery. . . . I say, gentlemen, this ought to be stopped. The manager at New York, backed by laws, has put an end to it there, so far, that no theatre in Europe precedes it in order or decency.

FORENSIS

Nor was *Forensis* alone in raising the great American cry: "Something ought to be done about it." The editors of *The Mirror of Taste* thought so too, and so, probably, did a third correspondent, who wrote to them as follows: —

The manager, or the magistrates, or somebody is greatly to blame about the playhouse. I brought my family to the pit to see the great actor Cooper play Zanga. We sat in the pit the whole time the blackguards were throwing down various kinds of things upon our heads. Scraps of apples, nutshells in handfulls, and what is worse something I can't well name — some

about me said that brandy or strong grog was thrown down — it might be so once; but it was not exactly that which fell on me and my family. Since then, I went to see him in *Macbeth*, and left my wife and daughter at home for fear; and the fellows above were as bad as before, and had I not luckily kept my hat on I should once have got my head broke with a hard, heavy hickory nut that was thrown down with all the force and spitefulness as if the person wanted to hurt some one very severely.

This Hogarthian picture of a theatre audience in Philadelphia, in the winter of 1809–10, gathered to witness the fine actor, Cooper, play *Macbeth*, and wearing their hats to protect their heads from a rain of hickory nuts but unable to protect their ears from the lewd conversation of the crowd, is not exactly idyllic, nor does it breathe of that courtly refinement and gravity which we are sometimes taught characterized the old times in the Colonies. We can fancy even Mr. Broun losing his good nature when smitten on the cranium by a hickory nut just as he was in the process of savoring a new epigram by G. B. Shaw.

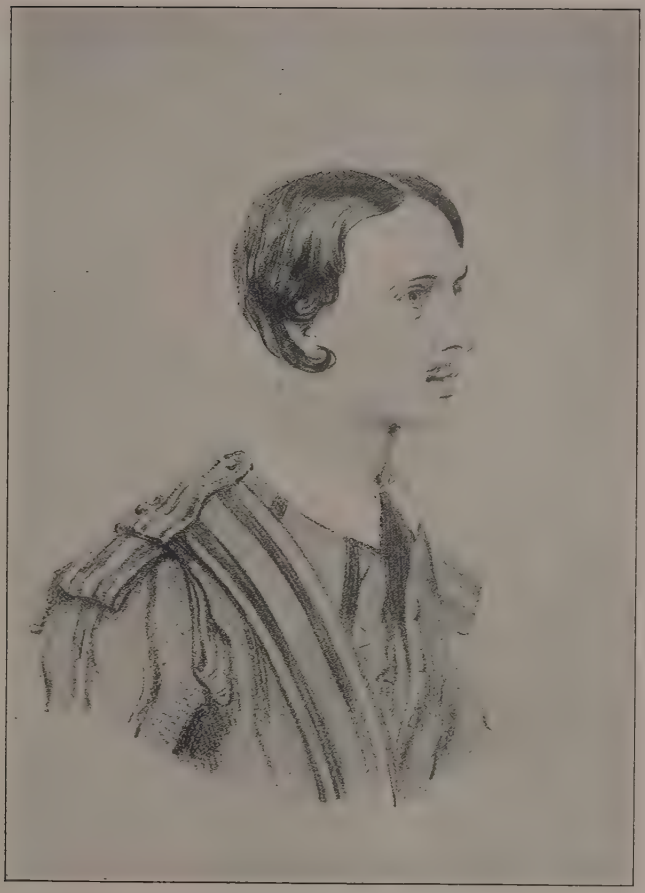
Nor, in spite of the recognition by many that Something Ought To Be Done About It, did matters appear to improve in the next year. In March 1811, George Frederick Cooke, visiting America for the first time, journeyed from New York to Philadelphia, with William Dunlap as his

manager to try to keep him sober, and played twenty nights at the Philadelphia Theatre, his receipts averaging over $1100 a performance — which in those days was a great deal. Dunlap records that people stood in line from Sunday morning to Monday morning, in order to get a choice of seats. Yet a correspondent of *The Mirror of Taste* could at the same time write a long letter, which he prefaced by assuring the public that he was not a prude, setting forth the degeneracy of the times, as illustrated by what went on in the playhouse. Women of the streets — he charged — sat not only in the balconies but in the boxes, and their conversations with the men of the audience seriously interfered with the performance.

> The titter of the impure, and the dull chatter of her stupid wooer, are not infrequently louder than the words of the actor. The stentorian lungs of Warren himself are no more than sufficient to drown the clack of these abominables. I wish I had it in my power to confine these animadversions to the young; but I cannot, regarding strict truth, do so. Men who ought to be at home training their children and grandchildren in a very different kind of morality, may be seen (a little more silly, to be sure, than the young) exposing their infirmity by awkward playfullness with those damsels, and luxuriating in prurient flippancy, when they would be more appropriately at home, wrapt up in flannel.

In spite of the fact that this correspondent speaks in his letter of "this once virtuous city" of Philadelphia, can it be possible that even prior to 1810 things were not always as they should be when Americans gathered together? In 1773 Josiah Quincy, Jr., of Boston, made a journey to South Carolina by boat, and then proceeded home by land. He kept a journal of the trip, which was edited and then printed by his son in 1825, and reprinted "with some additions" by his granddaughter in 1874. In neither printed version was young Josiah allowed to confess that in New York city he went to the theatre — and enjoyed it. But in the Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society for June 1916 is the full text of his journal, and for May 11, 1773, this entry: —

> Went to the playhouse in the evening, saw *The Gamester* and *Padlock* performed — the players make but an indifferent figure in tragedy, they make a much better in comedy. Hallam has merit in every character he acts: Mr. Wools as Don Diego and Mrs Morris in that of Ursula, I thought acted superlatively.
>
> I was however upon the whole much gratified, and I believe that if I had stayed in town a month should go to the theatre every acting night. But as a citizen and friend to the morals and happiness of society, I should strive hard against the admission and much more the establishment of a playhouse in any State of which I was a member.



GEORGE VANDENHOFF AS LEON, IN
"RULE A WIFE AND HAVE A WIFE"

If young Josiah Quincy, Jr. was the first, he was certainly not the last American to come to New York and enjoy himself, and then declare that such entertainment would n't do for the folks back home. But before condemning him as a hypocrite, and before condemning the whole New England attitude toward the playhouse in pre-Revolutionary days and even later, it is only fair to bear in mind the letters we have just been reading: to remember that while Quincy could concentrate on the play, he might possibly have entertained a reasonable doubt whether a good many of his young fellow-citizens were capable of so doing. He might have found the atmosphere of the American crowd in the playhouse a bawdy one, at any rate a rowdy one, and thinking of the North End element in Boston, have reasonably shrunk from the idea of establishing a theatre in his own city.

One was of course established there at last, after the Revolution, and it was not a great while before Edmund Kean had transferred to that city — so George Vandenhoff declares — the sobriquet of Edinburgh, and called it the Athens of America. Vandenhoff, however, a well-educated Englishman and an actor of merit, who first came to Boston in 1842, acting *Hamlet* at the Tremont Theatre (later Tremont Temple), speaks in his

autobiography of Boston's "notional, capricious, and rather uncertain public," and adds:—

> It is an unfortunate fact that, in spite of the proverbial literary taste of the City of Notions, the Drama properly so called . . . does not generally attract the Bostonians. Show and spectacle, glitter, blue flame and pantomimic extravagances, have infinitely greater charms for them. *Hamlet, Macbeth* and *The School for Scandal* have no chance against the Ravels and pantomime.

These words were written in 1859. Had Boston been better, and was it then going to the dogs? Or was young Quincy right in distrusting it with a playhouse, eighty-six years before? Who can say? Of this, however, we are reasonably certain: even in Boston, until nearly the middle of the nineteenth century, women of the town were admitted to the theatres for other purposes than the enjoyment of the play. How general the custom was may best be inferred from a brief passage in the autobiography of Anna Cora Mowatt, author of *Fashion* and a woman who had toured the country as a star actress. She knew what conditions were, and she was also a careful and accurate reporter.

> That the very worst abuse with which any theatre can be taxed *may* be abolished [she wrote in 1853] has

been proved in the Howard Athenæum in Boston, the Museum, and indeed all the theatres in that city, for five years, and at Niblo's in New York for an even longer period. I allude to the demoralizing effect of allowing any portion of the house to be set aside for the reception of a class who do not come to witness the play. I believe there have been other theatres in this country where this outrage upon morality is not tolerated, and the establishments have been as prosperous as those above mentioned. But this is a difficult topic for a woman to touch upon.

When Macready, a high-minded man, who devoted his entire life to what he considered the best interests of the English stage, took over the management of Drury Lane in 1840, one of his first acts was to plan a way of keeping the women of the town out of that theatre; and from his diary and the files of *The Times* and *John Bull* it is easy to see how flagrant the abuse had been, and how it had existed not only by the sufferance of managers but often actually with their connivance. They assumed, evidently, that the presence of the painted ladies lured masculine moths past the box office, more than enough to counteract any repulsion of the fastidious. Thus do we see that a commercial manager was a commercial manager, even in the Palmy Days.

Incidentally, of course, any reader of Restoration drama will recall prologues and epilogues that

indicate plainly enough the presence of this custom in the theatre of Dryden and Congreve, and the reasons for it.

But if Mr. Broun should read this far, and impatiently interrupt with the remark that, after all, such matters have to do with morals rather than manners, I shall find it easier to refer him to the vast *Autobiography of Joseph Jefferson* than to debate the point. It is a most entertaining book, crammed with anecdotes and inaccuracies: dates were something which the genial Rip could scarcely be expected to remember. But he was quite as unlikely to forget an unkindness. When he was a small boy, touring in the South and West with his family, it fell to him to sing the first stanza of "The Star Spangled Banner" at the conclusion of a Fourth of July performance, in St. Louis. Owing to excessive stage fright, he forgot the words —many of us cannot plead that excuse — and he was hissed and jeered off the stage, poor little fellow!

Of course [he says] I intend this anecdote to illustrate one of my early professional distresses, but it has another and a more important side.

The hissing and jeering that were so liberally bestowed upon me will never be vented again in this country for so slight an offense. The well-dressed,

decorous audience of to-day (1889) when an accident occurs, sit quietly, bearing it with patience and consideration, and when it is righted they break forth in encouraging applause.

Mr. Jefferson attributes this change in the public attitude entirely to the public schools. Possibly that is as good an explanation as any. He does not point out, as he might have done, that a hundred years ago, and less, quarrels between actors were taken up by rival factions in the audiences, who booed and hissed and even on one sad occasion resorted to fatal violence — when the Astor Place riot, instigated by followers of Forrest against Macready, resulted in a score of deaths. At any rate, a man who hissed a performer in an American theatre to-day, even under considerable provocation, would speedily find himself on the sidewalk, if not in the police station: not because of any increased regard for law or justice on the part of audiences, but because such an act is an obnoxious discourtesy to all concerned in the delicate business of creating theatrical illusion — players and audience alike.

It is inexcusably bad manners.

The next time the man in the seat behind him repeats *sotto voce* the bon mot which has just reached him from the stage, we beg Mr. Broun to

check his vexation long enough to remember that once on a time he might have been hit on the head with a hickory nut, or forced to listen to something very much naughtier than the bon mot, or even to have lost the voices of the actors altogether in a storm of boos and hisses. After all, modern manners must be judged relatively — like most other things.

SCENE VIII

Weber and Fields — The Last of a Line

The generation that can remember the Weber and Fields Music Hall is fast passing into middle age, when it has not already reached that period of anecdotage. Quite middle-aged are any who remember Harrigan and Hart, who built for their entertainments the Garrick Theatre on 35th Street, later occupied for a time by Richard Mansfield, and now the home of the Theatre Guild. Few indeed must be those who can remember Burton's Theatre on Chambers Street, or Brougham's Lyceum on the corner of Broadway and Broome Street. And probably there is nobody alive now who can recall the appearance of Mr. Mitchell, who opened the Olympic on Chambers Street in 1839 and presented his burlesques there for a matter of almost twenty years. In one of the earlier ones, *La Mosquito*, — based on *The Tarantula*, in which Fanny Elssler, the dancer, disported herself, — Mitchell himself was "*une première danseuse*," and we read on the old bill that "the scene lies in Hoboken." Tradition, however, and many published reminiscences — as well as the texts of more than one of the old burlesques, such as

Brougham's *Pocahontas* — give us a vivid sense of how personal, intimate, at times almost impromptu, these entertainments were. On the first bill, we find the scene laid in Hoboken, though the scenes of most serious dramas of that day were laid long ago or far away, unless they attempted to recreate American history. Mitchell, Burton, Brougham — and associated with them from time to time such players as Mark Smith, George Holland, W. J. Florence — kept alive, very much alive, in New York during all the middle years of the century, a form of theatre and of entertainment that was local in flavor, sophisticated yet racy, full of animal spirits and inspired nonsense. The Civil War and the subsequent years of moral depravity — so far as taste was concerned, at least — made a break in the line, but Harrigan and Hart, beginning far down on Broadway in 1876, restored to New York its theatre of intimate, local appeal; and Weber and Fields, coming up from the East Side music halls as "Dutch Dialect" comedians, carried on the tradition. Their entertainments differed from the musical farces of Bowery and Irish types made popular by Harrigan and Hart, and differed from the earlier burlesques of Mitchell and Brougham. Yet fundamentally the appeal was much the same: the appeal of unforced, jovial intimacy between audience and

HARRIGAN AND HART IN "THE MULLIGAN GUARDS"

stage, of spontaneous fooling, of impromptu jest; and indeed with Weber and Fields, to the very last, of actual burlesque, for they invariably closed their entertainment with a burlesque of some popular play of the hour.

The Weber and Fields Music Hall was a rather stuffy little theatre, with a ridiculously shallow stage, just south of Daly's Theatre on Broadway at 29th Street. It was first occupied by the two comedians and their company on Sept. 5, 1896. On Jan. 23, 1904, they parted company; the players associated with them scattered; after a brief attempt by Mr. Weber to run it alone, the Music Hall was no more. And since that day, New York — which unfortunately now means, theatrically, America — has had no personal, intimate playhouse, devoted to clever nonsense, hearty burlesque, the give-and-take of impromptu comedy in which the audience plays so important a part. Once or twice George M. Cohan has produced a "review" and revived for a fitful moment something of the ancient spell. But no one else has attempted it, except the Russian *Chauve-Souris*. New York is poorer for the loss.

I cannot write of Harrigan and Hart, though once as a lad I visited New York and heard "My girl is a Bowery girl" sung in its original and proper setting. I remember thereafter walking

the length of the Bowery to see what a wonderful place it was, and being bitterly disappointed, for it seemed to me ugly and rather sordid. But Weber and Fields! That is a different story. They belonged to my generation. When I came to New York as a cub reporter they were still in their glory, and Broadway between Madison and Herald Squares was still a centre of night life. At the Music Hall all the attendants knew the newspapermen and made them welcome. There was always a corner where one could stand and look through the haze of tobacco smoke, over the heads of the audience, to the shallow, brilliantly lighted stage. The auditorium was almost as intimate as a room, in fact, and one missed nothing by standing at the rear.

How can you give an impression of a vanished style of entertainment, of an atmosphere now dissipated, of personalities no longer present? Perhaps it is wisest not to try. Yet the temptation is almost irresistible. Little Joe Weber, lean enough in life, was always puffed out into a tub-like rotundity on the stage, while the dominating Fields was long and lank and sardonic toward his Sancho. Let no one suppose, either, that the nonsensical skits they performed together required no histrionic skill. They required skill of a high order. Indeed, Weber's ability to create illusion by seem-

ing to listen to the lank and domineering Fields with a kind of puzzled and pathetic earnestness, was an object lesson to all actors. Who that saw it can forget the skit in which Fields choked him?

"Ven I am avay from you, I cannot keep my mind off of you," Fields declared. "And ven I am near you — ven I am near you — " — here his hands went up and his fingers crooked, while Little Weber ran toward him in anticipation, chin up — "ven I am near you, I cannot keep my hands off of you." Then he grabbed the faithful one and began to choke and shake him violently. Just then Willie Collier appeared upon the scene, rushed at Fields, dragged him off, and began to berate him for assaulting the little fellow. Whereupon Weber, after adjusting his twisted neckband and gulping twice for breath, stormed up to Collier aggressively, demanding, "Vat right haff you got to interfere?"

There was something so comic in the surprise of the situation, something so true in the psychology, that the laughter was both uproarious and deep-seated. They had an instinct, these two, for situations both dramatically comic and significant of certain human traits. In their foolish way, the tall, domineering Fields, the fat, submissive Weber, were types, something as the water rat, the mole, and Mr. Toad, in *The Wind in the Willows.*

Once Fields had but a nickel. He wanted a glass of beer, but he did n't wish to appear stingy, so he rehearsed Weber to say he was n't thirsty when asked what he'd have; and then the two of them walked up to the bar.

"Vat vill you haff?" asked Fields, with a fine air of generosity.

"I'm not tirsty," Weber replied, by rote. Then you saw the happy, innocent inspiration dawn on his face. "But I'll take a see-gar!" he added.

The impromptu at the Music Hall was most frequently supplied by that tall, stout, genial Celt, Peter F. Dailey — peace to his ashes! Nobody, not even the librettist, Edgar Smith, not even Pete himself, knew what he would add to his part from night to night. Once, I recall, he made an entrance from the wings, supposedly from a banquet in his honor, and you heard, off stage, the sound of applause from the invisible diners. On a certain evening he looked back as he stood just on the stage, then turned to the audience with his engaging smile, gestured toward the wings, and remarked, "Jolly dogs, those stage hands." Everyone in the audience, of course, had an instant vision of the bored stage-hands clapping their grimy palms perfunctorily at a cue, and this puncture of illusion, this spontaneous touch of burlesque, was one more morsel of delight. I was present on an-

Weber and Fields in "Hokey-Pokey"

other occasion when Dailey improvised, this time to cover up an accident. It was during a burlesque of *The Merry Widow*, and the scene was a restaurant. Dailey entered wearing a huge fur coat which, when taken off and folded, displayed as lining a doormat with the word "Welcome" upon it. He found all prices on the menu so outrageous that he put this coat on again and was leaving the stage, when he stepped on something and started to fall. Being an extremely heavy man, there was actual danger. The other players sprang to catch him, and the audience gasped. But he righted himself, and then, in silence, stooped down and picked up a tiny object on which he had slipped. The play stopped. All the players knew he was going to say something not in the text. So did the audience. In an expectant silence he drew out a pocket book, counted the money in it, and then deposited the total sum in the head waiter's hands.

"Here," he said, "is twelve dollars. I stepped on a bean."

Then he beat a retreat, followed by shouts of mirth from actors and audience alike.

This incident had a rather curious sequel. A few years later, after the Music Hall was no more, a certain famous English dramatist visited America. He was the author of several internationally famous and brilliant comedies. Hearing much

about Weber and Fields, he asked some of us, one night at dinner, to tell him why their entertainment was so popular, to illustrate the style of humor. One of us told him this tale of Pete Dailey and the bean. He gave a perfunctory sort of laugh, and that was all. The subject was changed. But a full ten minutes later he suddenly burst into a shout of mirth.

"I have it now!" he cried.

"Have what?" we inquired.

"What made everybody laugh," replied he. "'Here's twelve dollars; I stepped on a bean.' The others did n't know what he meant! Ha, ha!"

There was really nothing to do but change the subject again.

It was from the Music Hall that Belasco took David Warfield, to make a star of him in "the legitimate," and incidentally to kill his ambitions to be a really fine and important actor. Warfield was a superb actor of burlesque, understanding perfectly the need of absolute solemnity and technical finish. The best burlesque can be acted, perhaps, only by first-rate artists. Charles Ross and Mabel Fenton, Lillian Russell and Fay Templeton, — whose impersonations of other actresses were so subtle that they were delicate satires rather than burlesque, — William Collier and De Wolf Hopper and Marie Dressler — how many

are the names that come back to one thinking of those gay, intimate nights at the Music Hall! To this day I can see the blonde Lillian coming out upon the stage, resplendent with jewels, her teeth glittering in the limelight as she smiled, and little rotund Weber taking her hand, gazing upon its jeweled fingers with pop-eyed admiration, and then crying out to Fields, "Meyer, come here qvick, and look in Tiffany's vindow!" Music, of course, played a large part in such entertainments, though with the exception of an operatic burlesque of *Lohengrin*, by Victor Herbert, it was tinkling and ephemeral. Girls, too, played a large part, pretty girls, intimately close to the audience. But neither music nor girls — always to be had elsewhere — accounted for the long-enduring popularity of the Music Hall. It was the artistic proficiency of the players in burlesque entertainment, their pleasant personalities, the wit and spontaneous, friendly intimacy and local tang of the whole fabric. Weber and Fields and their entertainment belonged on Broadway, were as much a part of the atmosphere of Broadway, as Madison Square itself, just to the south.

But, alas! perhaps it was a different Broadway from the present street. First the old Lyceum went, over on Fourth Avenue at 24th Street. Then the Madison Square Theatre went, along

with the Fifth Avenue Hotel. The Princess Theatre vanished. The Music Hall closed its doors. Wallack's Theatre followed, across the street. Daly's, next door, has been razed to the ground. A larger, noisier, far less homogeneous Broadway has swept by, uptown, and left behind only memories for some of us old folks. Yet I cannot quite believe that the tradition of an intimate theatre, conducted by skilled and popular comedians for the delicious fun of burlesque and pointed nonsense, a tradition existing in New York since the second quarter of the nineteenth century, is destined permanently to perish. If Mr. Cohan will not take up the mantle of Burton and Brougham, somebody else surely must — Mr. Frank Craven, perhaps. It is only when we jovially turn our theatre inside out that we evince the truest understanding of it. Aristophanes could have told us that.

SCENE IX

The Antique Gesture

No literary task is so difficult, I suppose, as the attempt to put into words the impression of an actor's style and personality, so that future readers may see him as he was. This is so difficult, indeed, that one is almost safe in asserting it has never been done. And, of course, the farther back you go, the farther removed the style of the actor is from current fashions, the more hopeless the task. Describing Richard Mansfield, for example, to a youngster of the present generation, you can suggest that he had the elocutionary force of Walter Hampden, touched with eccentricity and fire; that he had the charm of Barrymore; and a mordant irony such as Shaw would exhibit were he an actor. This hardly forms an adequate picture of Richard Mansfield, but it might at least convey to the young person some hint of the range, the variety, of his powers. Suppose, however, that your own memory went far back of Mansfield, — who was, after all, a modern, — and you sought to convey to our modern theatregoers some adequate idea of the acting of Wallack and his company in the Old Comedies; or of William Warren.

How would you set about it? What possible comparisons could you lay hold of that would have a meaning to your hearers?

The Old Comedies themselves are available to anybody who has the patience to read them. Now and then one of them gets itself revived. But at such a revival your most definite impression, if you are relatively young, is invariably bewilderment, then a gathering conviction that in their own time they were most certainly not acted this way, and a puzzled wonder just how they were acted. It was still possible twenty years ago to get a hint, because the cast would generally contain one or more of the "old-timers" who unconsciously fell into the ancient style, and thus, in five minutes, told us more about the history of the theatre than a wilderness of print. Now, however, this link with the past no longer exists, and any revival, even of Sheridan, seems like a piece of old music played on the wrong instrument. Even the plays of Shakespeare, marvelously adaptable as they are to changing styles, sometimes affect us in this way when the minor players have not taken the trouble to master the rudimentary and unchanging demands of declamatory speech.

One wonders, too, in reading the old plays, if there was a similar difference in acting, then, between the generations. Did the players of Charles

Lamb's day, for example, differ as much from the company of Colley Cibber as Mrs. Fiske and Eva LeGallienne and Glenn Hunter do from the actors Lamb watched so lovingly? Lamb wrote a famous essay on the "artificial" drama of the Restoration. He could endure its immorality because of its unreality. But I, who have just been reading a book full of plays which were the popular fare in Lamb's London, cannot for the life of me detect any more reality in them than in Congreve. *The Way of the World* would certainly revive more successfully to-day than *The Road to Ruin* or *The Stranger;* its wit, at least, would have a modern hint, and it is possible to fancy the Ethel Barrymore of 1910 drawling the part of Millamant with captivating effect. Can it be that Restoration drama was no more artificial to Restoration audiences than the plays of the Colemans were to Lamb's London, or than *Turn to the Right* is to us? Were the actors of Lamb's day, when they revived *Love For Love*, as out of tune as ours are when they revive *The School for Scandal?*

One thing always strikes you, however, when you read an old play, from Dryden's time to Boucicault's: in greater or less degree the actors are called upon to play for points; their rôles tend under stress always to become more or less conventionalized symbols of certain fixed emotions or

attitudes. Even when genius created them, as in *The School for Scandal*, this is true. In those created by a mediocre talent, like our friend Holcroft, a mere reading of the text suggests that the actors were called on to do the most extraordinary things, which could be accepted as lifelike only by an audience which was accustomed to the convention. Consider, for example, the father in Holcroft's *Road to Ruin*, with his conventionalized transitions from rage to forgiveness. Having to play this part, a modern actor would feel obliged to make those transitions natural — and he would fail, of course. But no doubt an old-timer, as late as William Warren or John Gilbert, would have alternated bluster and benignity in such a delightful though conventional way that his audiences would have been quite captivated and even — perhaps — convinced.

I am reminded of a remark Ethel Barrymore once made about a certain old-style actress for whom she expressed great admiration, much to the surprise of her hearers.

"But why do you admire —— ?" they demanded.

"Because," drawled Miss Barrymore, "she performs so wonderfully those things which nobody ever does."

I am reminded, too, of a passage in the criticisms

of the late William Winter, who was writing of one of his pet aversions, Mrs. Patrick Campbell. That interesting actress essayed one of Bernhardt's rôles, Zoraya, and Winter said, "There was much sibilant vocalization, as of a jubilant lemon-squeezer. There was much self-conscious posing. The moon-eyed stare of ecstasy, fixed on nothing, frequently became visible. There was the contortion of anguish and there was the clinging clutch of desperation — old stage properties, all of them, and readily at the command of an old stager."

Well, the moon-eyed stare of ecstasy, fixed on nothing, and the clinging clutch of desperation, have not entirely passed from the stage, at that! Even the sibilant vocalization, as of a jubilant lemon-squeezer, is occasionally heard in the land. But they are seen and heard almost invariably in artificial plays, plays without our modern instinct for character delineation and truth to at least the surface of life, and they are the result of the player's effort to get an effect out of material we now recognize as artistically conventional and insincere. How infrequently the respectable Shakespearean actor resorts to them is but another testimony to Shakespeare's sense for character.

It is not strange that, in an age when the actor had to be trained to "put across" conventionalized effects with ease and assurance, books should

have been written to show him how to do it, much as schools exist to-day to teach the aspirant how to write the conventionalized motion-picture stories — and incidentally to bleed the poor author of what cash can be secured. One of the quaintest of these books for students of our theatre was published in London in 1807: *Illustrations of Rhetorical Gesture and Action*, translated from the German work of M. Engel and adapted to the English stage by Henry Siddons, who was a son of the great Sarah. He himself was an actor, and at one time attempted to be also a manager, conducting a theatre in Edinburgh. When he failed to prosper, he wrote to his mother and to his uncle, the famous Kemble, begging them to come and help him out with a joint engagement. His mother replied that she would come for half the receipts and a free benefit. His uncle replied that he would come for a free benefit and half the receipts. Business was business in the Kemble family!

Henry Siddons's book, in the main, is only a translation of the German work and is fearfully dull, being infrequently enlivened by such passages as this: "I do not know what evil genius persuades so many of our performers, the females in particular, that it is so exquisite a manœuvre to be perpetually rolling themselves on the ground. A lady acting Juliet, or any other character of

that description, will sometimes fall on the boards with such violence, when she hears of the death or banishment of her lover, that we are really alarmed lest her poor skull should be fractured by the violence of the concussion."

M. Engel, Member of the Royal Academy of Berlin, sought, as it were, to discover what are the most natural gestures and expressions under the stress of various emotions, and then to standardize them. It all sounds hopelessly artificial now, and probably it seemed so, even then, to the best actors. But we are permitted to doubt that all actors were the best even in Charles Lamb's day; and in our own era, surely, it would be quite possible to illustrate just such a book from the motion pictures, where all but the best actors "register" the various emotions by as conventionalized a system of gestures and expressions as M. Engel could devise. I seem to recall, too, in my early years, seeing on the table of a good lady in Boston, who taught "elocution," a book of much the same nature, which she employed in the process of instruction. My somewhat infrequent recent visits to the Lyceum entertainments have led me to believe this book is even yet in use.

Certainly when M. Engel's book was written and Siddons's translation was made, there could not have been so much smoke without some fire:

such minor workers in the theatre do not inaugurate theories; they follow facts. Allowing for all exaggerations, and even for a margin of theory, *Illustrations of Rhetorical Gesture and Action* has its value as a picture of acting in those days; and the English edition has for us an added value, because Siddons — so he says — caused all the drawings to be remade, showing the characters in the dresses they wore at that period in the London theatres; and he added, at the end, several illustrations from what to-day would be termed "current attractions." It is in these pictures that the greatest interest of the book now lies, because they show graphically a critic's idea of the correct way to express an emotion, based in all probability on how this or that admired player actually did express the emotion. It gives us a hint of the old acting.

Let us consider EXPECTATION. You might at first blush suppose that the young lady here depicted was about to make a gesture for which small boys are frequently punished by careful parents, but such is not the case. This is, if you please, "the interesting Juliet who, awaiting her dear Romeo, exclaims, 'Hist! Romeo, etc.' " It will be noted that she wears a Directoire gown, quite in the fashion of 1807. One hand is raised to the ear, better to detect the awaited sound; the body leans

"Expectation"

toward it, the eyes are open wide; the other hand is extended downward, both "to preserve equilibrium" and to indicate, by the down-turned palm, an eagerness "to push aside every intrusion which might trouble the attention requisite for a moment so replete with interest."

Let us turn now to JOY. This is not the specific joy of any definite character. It is just joy. It is, perhaps, the origin of the lyric chorus, which for so long has come on "gayly skipping, lightly tripping." An actress who attempted the attitude to-day would undoubtedly inspire joy in her audience. But we shrewdly suspect that the reader of Siddons's book in 1807 beheld this picture without hilarity. Why not? His poetry for a century had been about Corydon and Phyllis, and when Phyllis appeared upon the stage we fancy she entered joyously, R. U. E., just about like the damsel in this illustration.

Our next illustration does not depict a member of the Olympic team acting as judge and timer for the mile run. He is neither signaling the last lap nor consulting a stop watch. He is indicating to the London audience of 1807 the passion of HOPELESS LOVE. He is Octavian, in the play, *The Mountaineers*, and in his left hand he holds a portrait of his faithless one — "sweet Florianthe" — which he is addressing in blank verse. I regret to

"Joy"

say that Siddons does not tell us what significance we are to attach to the posture of his right hand. Its connection with either hopeless or requited love cannot be fathomed by our dull age.

Much as I should like to reproduce a dozen more of these quaint old pictures, I must content myself with but one. It is called RUSTIC CUNNING, and the character depicted is Sheepface, in *The Village Lawyer*. Sheepface was arrested for sheep-stealing, and brought before the magistrate, where we here see him. Later, under cover of his rustic simplicity, he got the better of the lawyer who had defended him. By labeling this illustration RUSTIC CUNNING, Siddons would seem to imply that we are to detect from his aspect and attitude the cunning as well as the rusticity. That, I think, is asking a little too much — as the actor said when he read the stage direction for his part: *Enters, looking as if he had just had a cup of tea.* But what you will instantly detect in this picture, if you are at all an observant theatregoer, is the exact attitude and aspect which every routine player to this very day assumes automatically when he is called upon to play a simple rustic, or for that matter a workman, let us say, in the presence of a queen. Not long ago I assisted in the compilation of a play about Queen Victoria, and in one scene that worthy monarch condescended to receive a small

"Hopeless Love"

delegation of laboring men — Labor, in the good Victoria's day having less ready access to the seat of Power. Two or three actors of standing were selected to impersonate these delegates, and the rehearsal began. Out on the stage they came, each grasping his hat against his stomach with one hand and letting the other dangle down expressively at his side, and assumed before the Queen so exactly the attitude of Sheepface in this picture that I burst out laughing, and was at some difficulty tactfully to explain the cause.

As a matter of fact, I suppose this particular conventionalized posture has persisted on the stage for more than a century, — like enough for more than two centuries, — because the stupid rustic, or the clumsy fellow from any lower social station, has been brought into the drama as a lay figure or as comic relief. No attempt has been made to study him, to humanize him. He has remained, into our own day, himself a conventionalized thing. Put on a play by Tolstoy, by Gorky, however, and all such conventionalized attitudes and gestures disappear. It is, after all, but another illustration of what we have been saying: that individualizing characterization in the drama is the great foe of standardized methods of representation. The modern playwright has made the modern actor, and in all probability there was as much

"Rustic Cunning"

monotony in the old acting as there was in the old plays. Certainly the style of acting in those plays must have differed from the modern style, in the same measure as the style of the plays differed. It is of course possible, working within a very narrow convention, to produce results of power and beauty; and such results the old actors unquestionably achieved, probably far more often than the playwrights did. But the conventions in which they worked would be quite ineffective and sometime ludicrous in the modern theatre, as no one knows better than the few old-timers we still have left, and who sometimes, in a convivial moment, will confess and illustrate to you how they used to act.

Other times, other gestures — or none at all.

SCENE X

Through Marginal Meadows with William Everett

The late William Everett, of Quincy, headmaster of Adams Academy, member of Congress, scholar, orator, was a son of Edward Everett, inheriting his father's gifts of memory if not of manners. It used to be said that the only man in Boston who could rival Edward Everett in charm and urbanity of deportment was William Warren, the comedian. It was also said that Everett, after writing out an oration which required an hour or more in the delivery, would place the manuscript on the speaker's desk and never once look at it as he spoke; but a stenographic report of his address would show that he had not departed from it by so much as a syllable. The mere process of writing it down fixed it perfectly in his memory. Every one who knew Everett's son William, especially those boys who sat under him in the old Academy in Quincy, can testify that he did not inherit his father's urbanity of manners. He was explosive, eccentric, excitable. But his memory was even more remarkable than his father's. A friend of mine who had been his pupil was walking with him once in

Cambridge, and chanced to make reference to a line in Virgil, whereupon the Doctor quoted the line, and kept on till he had repeated the entire book in which it occurred. I believe it is a fact that he sometimes taught Virgil without using a text himself. Once, I recall, he was invited to make a speech in Boston, on the occasion of a public reception to the officers of an Italian warship in the harbor. For fifteen minutes he recited Tasso! "I've waited fifteen years for this chance," he explained to the astonished guests.

About our mother tongue, too, he had decided opinions, which he did not hesitate to express, some of which anticipated by many years those of Mr. Mencken, and some of which did not. He was not a critic without prejudices, to be sure: his prejudices were the most interesting thing about him. He would have agreed heartily with the Philadelphia book-dealer who recently catalogued a copy of Adams's *Struggle for Neutrality* with the comment: "The only good thing about neutrality is its impossibility."

That is, he would have if the comment had not come from a Philadelphian.

But what has he to do with this rambling book about the theatre?

A few years ago I was forced by Fate to spend a night in the city of Chattanooga, Tennessee. It

is quite possible to spend a day in Chattanooga without pain. One can climb Missionary Ridge and Lookout Mountain, viewing the magnificent oxbow of the river and visualizing what must have been a picturesque battle. But at night! The city seems surrounded by railroad tracks whereon freight cars are continually shunted and shifted and bumped, making sleep impossible. On the night when I was there, at any rate, no amusement was offered except a motion-picture show, which to me is always the last resort. I wandered up and down the streets, miserable and forlorn, till quite unexpectedly I came upon a second-hand bookshop, and fairly leaped through the door, to the consternation of the proprietor, who had apparently settled down for a quiet evening of solitary meditation. The orange-brown backs of ten volumes of the Variorum Shakespeare presently caught my browsing eye, and investigation disclosed the fact that several of these volumes were presentation copies, either from old Dr. Furness himself, or from his son. Five of them, moreover, were presentation copies to William Everett: *Antony and Cleopatra*, *The Tempest*, *Richard III*, *Macbeth*, and *Love's Labour's Lost*, and a hasty inspection showed his to me somewhat familiar handwriting here and there in the margins. I purchased the ten volumes for about one half the

retail price, and had them shipped home. By what chance they had found their way to Chattanooga, I cannot say; the sleepy shopkeeper could not enlighten me. They had come to him in a lot of books bid on at some auction. The collector, however, takes his luck where he finds it.

I was glad to have the ten volumes of the Variorum at so cheap a price, presentation copies or not; and as it turned out upon more careful inspection at home, I had a marginal companion in Doctor Everett, who was never dull, frequently explosive, and at all times filled with a certain irritable common-sense that to a person like myself, who regards Shakespeare as a dramatist no more sacred than any other, though considerably better than some, of course, is infinitely refreshing. I think perhaps I owe it to Doctor Everett's memory, little as these notes of his were intended for any eye but his own, to make a few of them public. If they give pain in certain quarters, at times, it is rather because they are corrective than unkind; and, after all, no comments on the Variorum can shake its ultimate position of importance nor lessen the debt we owe to the devotion of its compilers.

Turning first to *Antony and Cleopatra*, page vii of the Preface, we find Doctor Furness discoursing on the puzzlement certain obscure words in Shakespeare have given the commentators, and saying:

"In sooth, I think that they impart a certain charm; they give the imagination play. What an imposing grandeur is imparted to Antony's deportment when we learn that 'he soberly did mount an arme-gaunt steed'! What image of panoplied gauntness is there here lacking? And that Antony could soberly mount this hippogriff betokens a serenity of mind that of itself ranks him with the gods."

To which Doctor Everett, in the margin, retorts, "*Nonsense.*"

In Act II, scene v, Cleopatra makes her famous remark: "Let it alone; let's to billiards . . . . " thus letting loose two entire pages of comment to be gathered up by Doctor Furness, regarding anachronisms in Shakespeare — even setting forth that this is no anachronism at all. Among other things quoted is a passage from the *Edinburgh Review*, stating that Shakespeare could not have made any of his characters speak of tobacco without being grossly anachronistic. Doctor Everett's comment on this comment is at least revealing.

"*Shakespeare,*" he writes, "*being a man of gentle and refined nature, would not sicken his readers by introducing the gratuitous filth of tobacco.*"

Doctor Furness himself closes the long discussion of anachronisms with the statement: "But the anachronisms would not be discovered by anybody

in his audience if a dramatic author were to represent . . . the Jews returning in hats and shoes from their Babylonish captivity"; to which Doctor Everett retorts, exasperated to the point of double exclamation points: —

"*But hats and shoes are in the Bible!!*"

Somewhat further on, discussing a suggested change in the text, the editor says, "Thirlby's change is so trifling, while the gain is so marked, that I think it may be adopted without heinous disloyalty to the Folio."

At which Doctor Everett bursts forth on the margin: "*And why should that bad copy of bad versions claim our loyalty?*" — a question the puzzled layman has wanted to ask before now.

On page 203 (edition of 1907), the editor writes: "In a choice between a word coined by Shakespeare and one coined by Theobald, I prefer the former, even were it dark as ignorance."

There is plenty of room on the ample margin for the penciled comment here. It is simply, "*O bosh!*"

Again, on page 231 Doctor Furness returns, with some sarcasm, to this point of preference for Shakespeare's word, to which Doctor Everett replies, with a good deal of point: "*But you insist on ringing the changes on the idea that F.* [his abbreviation for Folio] *is Shakespeare, after proving it is not.*"

A later reference by the editor to "one of Shake-

speare's own words," leaves even Doctor Everett with no power of expression beyond a monosyllable. He merely blackens the margin with a "*Bah!*"

On page 347, Hudson is quoted as remarking that "Shakespeare sometimes used 'fancy' and 'imagination' as equivalent terms . . . . " Doctor Everett comments: "*And so they were, till Coleridge — or rather laudanum — made them distinct.*"

Another reference by the editor to "Shakespeare's own words" brings forth another "*Bah!*" On page 371 the comment is varied somewhat. Doctor Furness is upholding the reading, "Your crown's away," in place of the corrected — or emended — "awry," and speaks of Nichol's "praiseworthy attempt to vindicate the Folio." Doctor Everett has filled the margin with a bold, outstanding, "*Stuff!*"

Richard III, published in 1908, was edited by H. H. Furness, Jr., and by him presented to Doctor Everett. In the first paragraph of the Preface, the new editor says: "Thus the present text . . . has at least the merit of omitting nothing which we have reason to believe was Shakespeare's own — we, like Garrick, cannot lose one drop of that immortal man."

And the recipient, looking a gift book in the preface and finding these words, has written:

"*Your father has already quoted this, and silly enough it is.*"

On page 17, following the line, "In the deep bosom of the ocean buried," is Dunlap's description of how Cooke spoke that line. "At the beginning of 'In the deep bosom' he lifted the right hand a little, with a gently sweeping motion, and then, turning the palm downward, he continued, 'of the ocean,' and made a short pause; then sinking his hand — the palm parallel with the earth — and his voice at the same time, finished the sentence by the word 'buried.' "

Doctor Everett's comment on this is: "*And what is the sense of parading all this stuff?*"

(Incidentally, this particular piece of stuff helps to reconcile some of us to the actors of our own generation.)

There are few other comments of any sort in this volume, till page 599, where, in the appendix a glowing account of Booth's Richard in *King Henry Sixth* is quoted, commending especially his

> What, will the aspiring blood of Lancaster
> sink in the ground?

Doctor Everett has here gone down to the bottom of the page for sufficient blank space, and penciled this terse criticism of Edwin Booth: — "*But he called it Lánn — cáss — térrrr.*"

Indeed we have always suspected as much!

Doctor Furness published *Love's Labour's Lost* in 1904, and closed his introduction with the following characteristic paragraph: —

But, after all, is it of any moment whether Berowne preceded Benedick or Rosaline, Beatrice? All four of them fill our minds with measureless content; and if there be in them indications of the growth of Shakespeare's art, then these indications are never heeded when we see the living persons before us on the stage. What care we then for aught but what our eyes see and our ears hear? What to us then is the date when the play was written? Shall our ears at that moment be vexed with twice-told tales of the source of the plot? Be then and there the drowsy hum of commentators uncared for and unheard. We yield ourselves irresistibly to the power of Shakespeare, and only know that we are on enchanted ground. And is not this the mood for which Shakespeare wrote these plays? Is it not thus that he imagined his plays would be received? What mattered it to him, and still less should it matter to us, whether or not *Love's Labour's Lost* conformed to the rules of the drama? What if it be no genuine drama at all? Pompous pedants, courtly braggarts, brilliant men in the heyday of life, and girls of France in all the sparkling bloom of beauty and of youth, live a fragment of their gay or sombre lives before us; we share in their chagrin, we hear their merry laughter, and we triumph in their joy. We would fain arrest the curtain in its slow descent, and with eyes and ears continue another chapter in the story of Love's Labour, whether lost or won — that story without an end.

After this, the margin is none too wide to hold Doctor Everett's copious sentiments, which are thus expressed: —

"*This is probably held to be the real thing — a sort of Arcadian writing, such as Philip Sidney would have shared with Greville had he lived to be eighty — to me it is wearisome and unreal twaddle.*"

On page 56 the editor speaks of something being "to me, thoroughly Shakespearean," and Doctor Everett comments, "*To you, anything is thoroughly Shakespearean which to all the rest of the world is nonsense, if only you find it in F*" [Folio].

Indeed, many of the remaining comments on the margins of this volume are expressions of annoyance at Doctor Furness's passion for retaining the text of the Folio, or else ironical jibes at the efforts of the commentators to explain the Pedant's Latin.

The most interesting marginal remarks in the *Macbeth* (the Revised edition, edited by H. H. Furness, Jr.), are those which follow nearly all the references to Booth's acting directions for the play. To be sure, he takes the time to scribble an energetic "*Bah!*" after a reference to the magazine, *Poet Lore;* and numerous "*Stuff's*" after subtleties of interpretation by Coleridge, and others; and a "*Lord save us!*" after a suggestion that Shakespeare had in mind I Peter, ii, 2, "As newborn

babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby," when he wrote "the milk of human kindness." He also underlines a note telling what Irving did in his acting version, and comments: "*What man or woman, of common-sense and reading, cares two cents what any modern actor thinks?*"

Act II, Scene ii. Enter Macbeth.

Macb. Who's there? What, Ho!

Booth says this line is spoken by one of the drunken chamberlains. Doctor Everett says, "*O Lord!!*"

Act III, Scene i.

Macb. Adieu, till you return at night.

Booth says: "Banquo and Fleance cross to left. Fleance pauses to kiss the hand which Macbeth extends to him." Everett says: "*Every successive piece of business of Booth is more vapid than the last.*"

Act III, Scene i, line 115. Booth: "The murderers glance at each other." Everett: "*Bah!*"

Act III, Scene iv. Enter first Murderer.

Booth: "Enter first Murderer with the servants who bring dishes — first Murderer has a few drops of blood upon his cheek — he brings a goblet of wine to Macbeth." Everett: "*O you humbug!*"

Act III, Scene iv. Line 39. Booth: "Macbeth is about to drink, but the color of the wine sickens

him, and he gives the goblet back to the Murderer, who places it on the table." Everett: "*Bah!*"

A note which says that Booth omitted the ghost of Banquo inspires Everett to comment: "*This is enough to prove it ought to appear.*"

But we have quoted sufficient passages to show rather clearly that Doctor Everett apparently possessed no overwhelming admiration for Edwin Booth, and enough to show, perhaps, that to him the devices of the stage to create emotion are bumptious and belittling interferences with the austere march of poetic tragedy. Whether behind these comments on Booth some personal feeling lay, I cannot state. It is barely possible.

The margins of *The Tempest* are more "sedgy with citations" — or perhaps in the case of Doctor Everett water pepper rather than sedges sprang up by the stream of text — than in any of the other plays. Here he is particularly annoyed by the frequent references to the proceedings of the Philadelphia Shakespeare Society, and the comments of one Allen, evidently a member. "*Bah! Allen!! Philadelphia!!!*" he exclaims.

Over Furness's attempt to make line 165, Act I, scene ii, —

Which since have steaded much, so of his gentleness,

metrically correct, he says: "*In all these cases, I*

conceive it to be no Alexandrine, nor the syllables to be excessive — the line runs all right, if only people know how to read."

When, in the notes, the "beak" and "waist" of a ship are carefully defined, he remarks, "*Why don't you define king, ship, deck, and cabin?*"

When Ariel is told to go and make herself like a nymph of the sea, and the Philadelphia Shakespeare Society suggests that "thus in character she can best sing a sea nymph's song," and Doctor Furness says that this explanation of the order is "doubtful," the reader in Quincy grasped his pencil and wrote: "*No, not doubtful: undoubtedly absurd, or rather Philadelphian.*"

Again, when a note by the same Society is quoted, he says: "*As if any mortal soul outside Philadelphia cared for any opinion entertained in it. The editor gets all his acumen from Harvard College.*"

The next marginal comment is not without pathos. Furness has remarked: "Where in Marlowe, among lesser traits, is the promise of the infinite wit that can set the whole world on a roar?" And Doctor Everett, sitting alone and feeble in his study, has penciled: "*I know but little of Marlowe; but cannot a man be a great poet without 'wit to set the world on a roar'? Æschylus — Lucretius — Virgil — Dante — O for health to utter!*"

Another reference to the same Philadelphia

Shakespeare Society brings a brisk "*O hush!*" A second one evokes, "*Spare us!*"

Then Doctor Furness in a note, uses the expression, "I doubt if Antonio," and so forth; and Everett underlines the "if" and says: "*I thank you for forgetting your absurd 'doubt that' fad, for once, and writing English.*"

Another reference to the Philadelphia Society wrings from him so dark a "*Don't!*" that I am sure he spit on his pencil.

We print his next comment for what is is worth, being unable to confirm or contradict it. A commentator says: "Did Caliban mean that his new friend should eat 'the nimble marmoset'?" To which Everett adds, "*Monkey is good eating.*"

Now comes another and a long quotation from the Philadelphia Shakespeareans, which drives Doctor Everett to implore his friend, Furness, "*O spare us your Village Improvement Society!*"

On page 201, I came with surprise upon a new antipathy of the peppery Doctor's. Furness speaks of "Emerson's fine phrase, to 'turn the sod to violet.' " And Everett comments, "*If fine, not Emerson. If Emerson, not fine.*"

Exit Emerson!

Page 206 discloses a quaint foreboding of an attitude that was shared by some millions of Doctor Everett's countrymen, not so many years later.

After quoting some silly commentary by a Teutonic writer named Meissner, Doctor Furness remarks: "Can the grief of the judicious be here restrained from breaking forth?" And Everett caps this with, "*Can a German move any of English breed to grief? Contempt alone is their portion.*"

Meissner is quoted again later, as saying that a smaller share of the inventive faculty of a novelist falls to the German nation than to the Romance peoples, and Everett makes his final comment: "*The inventive power of a German dealing with Shakespeare is infinite.*"

After all, to take pencil in hand and sit down to read a book with your antipathies as well as your sympathies alert, and ejaculate your honest reactions on the margin, is to add enormously to the interest of that book for the next reader. It is, at any rate, if you are a William Everett. I once secured a copy of the poems of Frederick Goddard Tuckerman, presented by him to Harriet Beecher Stowe, and eagerly scanned the pages for any sign of her reactions to those verses, which in some ways curiously anticipated the modern movement in poetry. But all I found was a newspaper clipping pasted in the back cover — a genealogy of the Beecher family!

A book I should dearly like to possess would be a copy of Mencken's *The American Language*,

which Doctor Everett had read, pencil in hand. But no such treasure exists. I have to be satisfied with the Variorum Shakespeare and his opinions of Edwin Booth — my strange souvenir of a sleepless night amid the Chattanooga freight-engines.

SCENE XI

John Brown's Revenge

There is a certain pleasant irony in the fact that we celebrate the Pilgrim Tercentenary with pageants, calling the art of the theatre to our aid. One can think of nothing the Pilgrim Fathers would have been less likely to approve. The theatre had a hard enough time before the Revolution everywhere north of Virginia and Maryland — in Quaker Philadelphia or Dutch New York, as well as in Calvinistic New England. But in Philadelphia and New York it did somehow manage to get a precarious foothold in the mid-eighteenth century. In New England, just one attempt was made to establish a theatre prior to the adoption of the Constitution of the United States, and that attempt ended in complete failure. Rhode Island was chosen for the effort, as the most liberal of the New England colonies. When even Rhode Island would have none of the damnable contagion, the actors saw it was no use and retired in good order to New York.

The attempt was made in the summers of 1761 and 1762, the first year in Newport, the second year in Newport first and then in Providence —

at that time the smaller by half of the two cities, counting some four thousand inhabitants. The Providence experiment resulted in an Act of the Legislature similar to an Act already passed in Massachusetts after two Englishmen attempted to give a single performance of *The Orphan* in Boston in 1750, but carrying far more severe penalties, which effectually barred all further attempts. The company which came to Newport in 1761 was headed by David Douglass and was the organization which succeeded the Lewis Hallam company after Hallam's death in Jamaica in 1756. Lewis Hallam brought his company to America in 1752, and first performed at Williamsburg, Virginia. He was a brother of William Hallam, manager of Goodman's Fields Theatre in London, and both he and his company were actors of standing. His was not the first company to play in America, but in all probability it was the first which was entirely professional and which had a well-rehearsed and competently acted repertoire.

David Douglass married Hallam's widow and became the second head of this troupe. He was a gentleman by birth, who had emigrated to Jamaica in 1750. After the Revolution forced the closing of all colonial theatres, he returned to Jamaica, and became a Crown judge. His wife, as Mrs.

Hallam, had been a member of Goodman's Fields when Garrick was also in that company, and other of the players were similarly experienced.

The Douglass players, then, were not barnstormers, but actors of some quality, as, indeed, they would needs have been to handle their extensive repertoire. Moreover, they arrived in Newport, in the summer of 1761, highly recommended by "the Governor, Council, and near one hundred of the principal gentlemen of Virginia."

WILLIAMSBURG, JUNE 11, 1761

THE company of comedians under the direction of David Douglass have performed in this colony for near a twelvemonth; during which time they have made it their constant practice to behave with prudence and discretion in their private character, and to use their utmost endeavours to give general satisfaction in their public capacity.

We have therefore thought proper to recommend them as a company whose behaviour merits the favour of the public, and who are capable of entertaining a sensible and polite audience.

This recommendation was printed in the *Newport Mercury* on August 11, but it appears from the town records that on the first of that month a town meeting had been called, and it had been put to vote whether the freemen "were for allowing

plays to be acted in town or not." The freemen were decidedly not. This, however, did not appear to discourage the players, who went ahead getting a temporary theatre ready. On September 7 they acted *The Provoked Husband, or a Journey to London*, for the benefit of the poor. This was the first professional stage-performance in New England. It netted $158 in Spanish silver, which was used to buy corn, to be stored and delivered the following winter to needy families.

Even in those days, Newport was a city of well-marked social cleavage. There were extensive slave-holding plantations adjacent to it, and it had something of a Southern character. Moreover, as Willard notes in his *History of the Providence Stage*, there were at the time some sixty Jewish families, many of them wealthy, and traditionally friendly to the playhouse. The freemen may have voted against the theatre but the wealth of the city evidently wanted it; and wealth had its way — as has more than once happened in the history of this planet.

The Douglass company continued to act until November, finishing their season with another charity performance. They then embarked for New York, where they acted all the following winter — not without opposition, to be sure.

Early the next summer (1762) found them back in Newport, where they gave several performances in "the large room of an inn." That the opposition to the players had not abated, is made evident by one of their playbills. This bill — later given by Mr. Morris, a member of the company, to the actor, John Bernhard — was first printed in 1850, in Bernhard's posthumous papers, and has since disappeared. Every collector in America has sought it in vain, till some have come to believe that Bernhard invented it. That David Douglass did not invent this transparent device to get around the moral scruples of a community is, of course, evident, because something of the kind was often practised in provincial England. But he appears to have been peculiarly fertile in embellishments. Incidentally, this form of hypocrisy continued to be employed in New England, in the city of Boston, into the last decade of the nineteenth-century: the Boston Museum was never called a "theatre," and stuffed animals in glass cases in the lobby — as well as, for many years, the omission of Saturday evening performances — salved the consciences of pious Bostonians who wished to attend the play.

Here is David Douglass's bill (or supposed bill) for *Othello*, in Newport, in 1762.

KINGS ARMS TAVERN, NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND

On Monday, June 10th, at the Public Room of the above Inn, will be delivered a series of

MORAL DIALOGUES

in five parts

Depicting the evil effects of jealousy and other bad passions, and proving happiness can only spring from the pursuit of virtue.

Mr. Douglass — Will represent a noble and magnanimous Moor called Othello, who loves a young lady named Desdemona, and after he has married her, harbours (as in too many cases) the dreadful passion of jealousy.

> Of jealousy, our being's bane,
> Mark the small cause and the most dreadful pain.

Mr. Allyn — Will depict the character of a specious villain, in the regiment of Othello, who is so base as to hate his commander on mere suspicion, and to impose on his best friend. Of such characters, it is to be feared, there are thousands in the world, and the one in question may present to us a salutary warning.

> The man that wrongs his master and his friend,
> What can he come to but a shameful end?

Mr. Hallam — Will delineate a young and thoughtless officer who is traduced by Mr. Allyn, and, getting drunk, loses his situation and his general's esteem. All young men whatsoever, take example from Cassio.

> The ill effects of drinking would you see,
> Be warned and fly from evil company.

Mr. Morris — Will represent an old gentleman, the father of Desdemona, who is not cruel or covetous, but is foolish enough to dislike the noble Moor, his son-in-law, be-

cause his face is not white, forgetting that we all spring from one root. Such prejudices are very numerous and very wrong.

> Fathers beware what sense and love ye lack,
> 'Tis crime, not color, makes the being black.

Mr. Quelch — Will depict a fool who wishes to become a knave, and trusting to one, gets killed by him. Such is the friendship of rogues. Take heed.

> When fools would knaves become, how often you'll
> Perceive the knave not wiser than the fool.

Mrs. Norris — Will represent a young and virtuous wife, who, being wrongfully suspected, gets smothered (in an adjoining room) by her husband.

> Reader, attend, and ere thou goest hence,
> Let fall a tear to hapless innocence.

Mrs. Douglass — Will be her faithful attendant, who will hold out a good example to all servants, male and female, and to all people in subjection.

> Obedience and gratitude
> Are things as rare as they are good.

Various other dialogues, too numerous to mention here, will be delivered at night, all adapted to the improvement of the mind and manners. The whole will be repeated on Wednesday and on Saturday. Tickets, six shillings each; to be had within. Commencement at 7. Conclusion at half past 10, in order that every spectator may go home at a sober hour, and reflect upon what he has seen, before he retires to rest.

God save the King,
And long may he sway,
East, North and South,
And fair America.

The parenthetical assurance that Desdemona will be smothered in an adjoining room, and the promise of an early dismissal of the audience to facilitate its moral reflections, are particularly happy touches. We should like to have known Mr. Douglass.

After a few performances in Newport, Douglass decided to visit Providence; just why, seems to be unknown. He may have been unable, in face of the opposition, to arrange for a theatre in Newport this second season. He may have been tempted by some vague prospect of patronage from Boston, for it is certain that people did later come from Boston to see his company. At any rate, to Providence he went, where a barn on Benefit Street, at the head of Gaol Lane, was fitted up for a theatre and called — the New School House! It is supposed that his performances began about July 1, 1762.

To overcome the municipal prohibition of stage plays, passed at a town meeting on July 19, he called his performances concerts, to which an admission was charged, and between the musical numbers threw in the plays gratis. The following advertisement appeared in the *Newport Mercury*:—

At the New School House in Providence on Thursday next, being the 12th of August, will be performed: —

A CONCERT OF MUSICK

VOCAL AND INSTRUMENTAL

to begin exactly at Seven o'clock

Vivat Rex

Between the several Parts of the Concert will be presented (gratis)

A Tragedy call'd

THE FAIR PENITENT

Sciolto	Mr. Allyn
Altamont	Mr. Quelch
Lothario	Mr. Hallam
Horatio	Mr. Douglass
Rossano	Mr. A. Hallam
Calista	Mrs. Douglass
Lavinia	Mrs. Morris
Lucilla	Mrs. Hallam

To which will be added (*gratis*)

A Pastoral Farce call'd

DAMON AND PHILLIDA

Damon	Mr. Stuart
Mopsus	Mr. Quelch
Cymon	Mr. A. Hallam
Phillida	Mrs. Morris
Arcas	Mr. Allyn
Corydon	Mr. Morris

N.B. There will be a Concert on Friday and on every Day next week except Saturday.

This little device, it might be noted, corresponded to that once used by the same Roger Kemble with whom Thomas Holcroft was associated, who, in Wolverhampton at the "Histrionic Academy," presented himself, Mrs. Siddons, and others gratis in *Love in a Village;* but, to secure one of the free tickets necessary for admission, you were invited to purchase a paper of tooth powder, at 2s, 1s, or 6d.

Douglass's continued defiance of the will of the majority and his continued evasions — alas, that not all his playbills have been preserved, for he was a rare humorist! — caused feeling to run high. There is even some ground for believing that the more hot-headed enemies of the theatre gathered to destroy it, but were frustrated in their attempt by certain of its friends, led by John Brown, the most prominent citizen of the town, who dragged a cannon from the gun house and threatened to use it. The majority, however, had ample resources in "law and order." They petitioned the Rhode Island Legislature, sitting at East Greenwich, for assistance. The Legislature, who presumably considered majorities as more important than the Muses, at once drafted a law, and on August 25 — the very day after the petition was presented — wrote the law into the statute books.

An Act *to Prevent Stage Plays and other Theatrical Entertainments within this Colony.*

For preventing and avoiding the many mischiefs

which arise from public stage-plays, interludes, and other theatrical entertainments, which not only occasion great and unnecessary expenses and discourage industry and frugality but likewise tend generally to increase immorality, impiety, and contempt of religion.

Be it therefore enacted by this General Assembly and by the authority thereof it is enacted that immediately from and after the publication of this Act, no person or persons whatsoever shall or may for his or her gain or any price or valuable consideration, by or under any pretence whatsoever, let or suffer to be used or improved, any house, room, or place whatsoever, in this colony, acting or carrying on any stage-plays, interludes or other theatrical entertainments, on pain of forfeiting and paying for each and every day or time such house, room, or place shall be let, used, or improved, contrary to the true intent and meaning of this Act 50 pounds lawful money. . . .

And whereas by a petition preferred to this Assembly by a number of inhabitants of the County of Providence setting forth that a number of stage-players have lately appeared and a play-house hath lately been built in said town of Providence; that the inhabitants of said town, being legally called by warrant, did at their late town meeting by a great majority pass a vote that no stage-plays be acted in said town; yet the actors thereof, in defiance of said vote and in defiance of the public authority of said town, have been and are now daily continuing to exhibit stage-plays and other theatrical performances, —

Be it therefore further enacted by the authority aforesaid that in order more speedily to cause this Act to be proclaimed where those present may have the

earliest notice thereof, that his Honor the Governor be and is hereby requested to issue a warrant directed to a proper officer or officers in said county of Providence, directing him or them on sight or receipt thereof to immediately proclaim the aforesaid Act by beat of drum through the streets of the compact part of said town of Providence; any law, custom or usage to the contrary hereof in any wise notwithstanding.

Paul Tew, the sheriff of the county, was at once despatched to Providence, with a copy of the Act in his pocket. He went to the "School House" and read it to the audience — but not till the play was over! Paul Tew was human.

So, sometime in the evening of August 25, 1762, the drama breathed its last in New England, until a new nation had been born in the fires of revolution. The Puritans — and politics — had won the day.

We now come again to Providence: to the Providence Opera House, on the evening of October 12, 1914. Brown University, named for a son of that same John Brown who stood out in defense of the wicked play-actors a hundred and fifty-two years before, was celebrating that week the one hundredth anniversary of its founding — and celebrating it on this particular evening by a play. John had, at last, his revenge!

The play chosen for the celebration was *The Provoked Husband; or A Journey to London*, which

we know for a certainty was in the repertoire of the Douglass company, being the first play they acted in New England. But the old Restoration comedy was acted in a setting that Vanbrugh and Cibber, its authors, would not have recognized. It was made a play within a play, the enclosing drama being called *In Colony Times*. The authors of this enclosing drama were Henry A. Barker (Brown '93), one of the most devoted of amateur workers in the theatre, and A. E. Thomas (Brown '94), a professional playwright. The scene of Act I showed Benefit Street in 1762, with the new Colony House on one side, and the Histrionic Academy, transformed from a cow-barn, on the other. This scene was designed by Mr. Barker to be as accurate a reconstruction as possible. The scene of Acts II and III was the interior of the Histrionic Academy on the evening of August 25, with the audience of Providence colonials and Boston visitors seated near the footlights, and in boxes made from converted haymows on the sides, while on the little stage at the rear Douglass and his troupe acted *The Provoked Husband*. The action of the enclosing play, of course, was designed to make clear the opposition to the theatre, and culminated in the reading by Sheriff Tew of the prohibitive statute which closed the theatre for good. The early arrival of the sheriff and his conflict between a sense

of duty and a desire to see the play, furnished an amusing episode, while the larger conflict between those who, like John Brown, were well disposed toward the drama, and those who saw it only as a weapon of the Devil, filled the play with a vivid sense of struggle. This enclosing drama, too, gave an immediate and visual historical perspective for *The Provoked Husband* — which, of course, had to be liberally cut in order to get it into the time limits. The old comedy, however, stood up remarkably well on its own legs. Colley Cibber may not have been a great playwright, but the technical merits of forward-marching story and suspense were surely his, and they do not "date." The play, too, in actual performance, has a similarity to *The School for Scandal* that could hardly be found to-day between a play of our generation and one written half-a-century ago. There was a persistence of style in the eighteenth century that we in our era of change know nothing about.

The play, as well as the enclosing drama, was acted by amateurs, and mounted and staged by amateurs. The occasion was a very special one, and called forth an unusual expenditure of volunteer effort. The result, however, justified the effort; for not only was an interesting Restoration comedy revived, but an interesting episode of American theatrical history was made vivid and

an illuminating period of Colonial life reconstructed. When I think of all the so-called historical pageants I have endured, up and down the land, most of which are but clumsily pictorial and almost none of which is ever remotely dramatic, this performance in the Providence Opera House stands out "as the shadow of a great rock," suggesting a possible technique for our community efforts at historico-dramatic production that promises far more interesting results than the misnamed "pageants." The play within a play is by no means always possible, though highly desirable because the inner play, at least, can be of dramatic value. But the reconstruction of an episode, a period, in terms of the drama, a part of your players being the populace of that period, a part the participants involved in some struggle that affected the community — the setting, that is, of your episode in its own environment instead of in the ninth fairway of the golf club — is always possible, if somebody has the intelligence to see it. Certainly, if David Douglass, thus belatedly, can be the means of making American pageants less dreary and boresome and unrelated to anything remotely resembling the living art of the drama, he will not after all have made in vain his attempt to bring Vanbrugh and Cibber and Shakespeare to the Puritans of New England.

SCENE XII

Legs in Grandpa's Day

There are two classes of dramatic critics who should be compelled to read theatrical history — all the young critics and all the old critics. The young critics should be compelled to read it so they might learn that there were kings before Agamemnon, and the old critics, so they might be reminded that the stage always was degenerating and "not what it used to be." (To be sure, the suspicion haunts us that not all the historical reading in the world will ever cause a young critic to believe an old one, nor an old one to accept the verdicts of the present!)

When John Barrymore acted Richard III in New York, his first venture into Shakespeare, there were various extravagant reviews of his performance, by the younger critics, disclosing a strange ignorance of theatrical tradition, and sometimes ascribing to Mr. Barrymore business as old at the least as Kean. Professor C. T. Copeland, of Harvard, meeting Heywood Broun, then dramatic critic of the New York *Tribune*, asked him why no critic pointed out that Garrick and Edwin Booth also made their Shakespearean débuts as Richard.

JOHN BARRYMORE AS RICHARD III

Photograph by Francis Bruguiere

Broun evaded the question by saying that the public would not have been interested. Perhaps they would n't — but it should interest a critic; should fascinate and thrill him, in fact; and he ought to impart something of this fascination, this thrill at the continuance of a Royal Line.

On the other hand, there is the old critic — any critic who can remember Sothern in *The Prisoner of Zenda* is an old critic to the present generation — like myself, who is in danger of periodic eruptions of encomium for the past and of jeremiads over the degenerate present. Some one of us is always discovering that the theatre is going to the dogs, and since we — unlike the theatre managers — are Anglo-Saxons, this is less often because of the intellectual flabbiness or falsity of our drama than of its "low moral tone." Forever it treads the primrose path, lured to destruction by lovely creatures with bare knees, — it long ago having been demonstrated that, in spite of Percy Hammond, knees are an entertainment as well as a joint, — and followed by a debased public who leave forsaken on the cleanly heights the white temple of Melpomene.

It was a rainy afternoon in New York. To escape a peculiarly drenching gust, I stepped into a second-hand bookshop. I picked up a green-covered book

called *Women and Theatres*, by Olive Logan, and looked at the date — New York, 1869. The titles of chapters nine and ten appealed to me: "About the Leg Business"; "About Nudity in Theatres." I bought the book at once, and subsequently learned therefrom that just previous to 1869, when it was issued, the American stage — at least in New York — was in a most deplorable state, entirely given over, in fact, to inanity and indecency. Creatures who had no claim to any artistic recognition commanded as much as $1000 a week for displaying their persons on the boards where once Rachel had trod, while "legitimate" actresses begged in vain for employment. "The leg business," as Miss Logan so happily paraphrased the managerial "show business," was supreme. But before I let Miss Logan speak for herself, I must tell you who she was.

If you possess a copy of T. Allston Brown's miscalled *History of the American Stage* (1870), you will find a picture of her, looking for all the world like a mature version of the portrait of Daisy Ashford which prefaces *The Young Visiters*. The biographical matter suspiciously suggests that she helped write it. She was born in 1841, the daughter of an actor, and herself became an actress in her thirteenth year. In 1857 she retired, married, and went abroad, where she was introduced at

the French Court and seems to have known many people in Paris and to have written much of a gossipy nature for various papers. She returned to New York in 1864, and reappeared on the stage at Wallack's Theatre, in a play by herself, called *Eveleen*. She continued to act, with much popular success, until 1868, when she quit the stage again and took up a career which included writing plays, magazine articles, and books, and much public speaking, especially in the cause of "women's rights." She appears to have been outspoken, aggressive, quite able to hold her own, and certainly entitled to write of the theatre with some authority.

So now let us consider what she has to say about legs in grandpa's day.

It is unpleasant to mention names [she says]; it is disagreeable and even dangerous to do so; but when such women as Cora Pearl, Vestvali, Menken, and their like were insolent enough to invade the stage, and involve in the obloquy which falls on them hundreds of good and pure women, it was time for even the most tolerant critic to express disapprobation.

Whatever the private character of these women might be, — however good, however bad, — we were justified, from their public exhibitions, in denouncing them as shameless and unworthy.

It is true, they made more money than any other class of performers; more money than the poetic

Edwin Booth; infinitely more than the intellectual E. L. Davenport.

Stifle conscience, honor, and decency, and mere money-making is easy work, as these women and others who have come later fully illustrate.

In this chapter, whose main facts were set down before the fever for "blonde burlesque" raged in our theatres, I treat principally of a style of performance which the above-named women illustrate, and which is already fluttering in the last agonies of death. But so long as it lives, however sickly, my denunciation of the women who illustrate it has excuse for being. These women are not devotees of any art. With the exception of Vestvali — a failure on every lyric stage, both in Europe and America — they do not either act, dance, sing, or mime; but they habit themselves in a way which is attractive to an indelicate taste, and their inefficiency in other regards is overlooked.

Ada Isaacs Menken — one of whose many husbands was "Orpheus C. Kerr" — was the chief exponent of the character of Mazeppa, which she played all over America and in England. Just before the publication of Miss Logan's book, indeed, she was directress of Sadler's Wells Theatre in London, which she opened with *Mazeppa*. She died the same year, 1868. She was described by Sala as "a little black-eyed beauty with elegant legs."

And what was it about, this sort of entertainment that so offended Miss Logan, causing her to

PAULINE MARKHAM, IN A COSTUME TYPICAL
OF THE AGE OF BURLESQUE

call a leg a leg, in a day when we had supposed even the most abandoned of them were limbs? She declares: —

The leg business is a business which requires legs. That these should be naturally symmetrical is desirable but not indispensable; for the art of padding has reached such perfection, that Nature has been almost distanced, and stands, blushing at her own incompetency, in the background.

New York can boast some artistic padders; and, if you are curious to know where they dwell, what their prices are, etc., you can go to almost any greenroom of this period, and find their business cards stuck about in the frames of the looking-glasses, in the joints of the gas-burners, and sometimes lying on the top of the sacred cast-case itself.

Strange to say, however, that Holy of Holies, the city of Philadelphia, bears off the palm in the pad-making art. Thus the New Jersey railroads are frequently enriched by the precious freight of penitential Mazeppas going on pilgrimages to the padding Mecca.

It is generally supposed — by those who suppose anything at all on the subject — that padding is employed only in the enlarging and beautifying of the calf of the leg, but this is a mistake.

Such little inaccuracies as knock-knees and bowlegs — trifling errata in Nature's original edition, remarkable for their frequency in the human family, and especially in those misguided members of it who have rashly chosen the stage as a profession — are nimbly rectified by the pad-professor.

I saw a letter from one of these the other day, which may be worth producing here for the sake of its ludicrousness. This is a genuine document, I pledge my word. It ran thus: —

Philadelfia

MAM: — Them tites is finished your nees will be all O K when you get them on. Bad figgers is all plaid out now they will caust 9 dollers.

It would seem that the nine-dollars capital, a couple of yards of white muslin, and the outer "tites," are all that is required of the followers of the Mazeppa school.

Of personal beauty, they often have little; of intellectuality, of comprehension, of grace, genius, poetry, less; and of talent, none.

When the part they portray calls for the speaking of words, we lift our hands in blank astonishment that any creature with audacity enough to assume such a position can have so little ability to fill it.

It is not, however, till the next chapter was written — "About Nudity in Theatres" — that Miss Logan found the stage quite utterly gone to perdition. By that time the blonde burlesque had captured it, and completed the breach made by *The Black Crook* and the Mazeppas. Lydia Thompson and her troupe invaded New York in 1868, and after that — the Deluge. Speaking at the Woman's Suffrage convention in Steinway Hall, New York, in May 1869, Miss Logan took occasion to attack the "coarse rage for nudity" which had spread in the theatre, and declared no decent woman could

now look to the stage for a career. Her words were evidently interpreted as an attack on the theatre itself.

"At once," she says, "there rose so wild a yell, as all the fiends from heaven that fell were furious at my course." (We cannot refrain from calling parenthetical attention to this sentence, as a quaint forerunner of polyphonic prose, "interior rhyme" and all.)

Well, Miss Logan, nothing daunted, took up the gauge of battle, and proceeded to describe the New York stage of 1869.

A woman who has not ability enough to rank as a passable "walking lady" in a good theatre, on a salary of twenty-five dollars a week, can strip herself almost naked, and be thus qualified to go upon the stage of two-thirds of our theatres at a salary of one hundred dollars and upwards.

Clothed in the dress of an honest woman, she is worth nothing to a manager. Stripped as naked as she dare — and it seems there is little left when so much is done — she becomes a prize to her manager, who knows that crowds will rush to see her, and who pays her a salary accordingly.

These are simple facts, which permit of no denial. I doubt if there is a manager in the land who would dream of denying them.

There are certain accomplishments which render the Nude Woman more valuable to managers in the degree that she possesses them. I will tell you what

these accomplishments are, and you shall judge how far they go toward making her, in any true sense, an actress.

They are: 1. The ability to sing. 2. The ability to jig. 3. The ability to play on certain musical instruments.

Now that I have put them down, I perceive that they need explanation, after all. So complete is the perversion of everything pertaining to this theme, that the very language is beggared of its power of succinct expression.

To sing. Yes, but not to sing as Parepa sings; nor such songs as she sings. The songs in demand in this sphere are vulgar, senseless — and, to be most triumphantly successful, should be capable of indecent constructions, accompanied by the wink, the wriggle, the grimace, which are not peculiar to virtuous women, whatever else they are. The more senseless the song, the more utterly it is idiotic drivel, the better it will answer in the absence of the baser requisites. Here is a specimen:—

> Little Bo-Peep, she lost her sheep,
> And don't know where to fi-*ind* her;
> Leave her alone and she'll come home,
> And fetch her tail behi-*ind* her.

A simple nursery song; and if men were babies, innocent and harmless in itself; but men are not babies, and the song is not sung in a simple or harmless manner, but with the wink or the idiotic stare that means a world, and sets the audience into an ecstatic roaring.

The dancing and the playing upon a musical instrument were, of course, of an equally simple, but the latter of a less compromising character.

A little later Miss Logan enumerates the New York theatres where "the English drama claims, or has claimed, a place." There were then only sixteen of them, including the just completed Booth's Theatre.

> Of this whole list [she says] there is but one (Booth's, which is but a few months old) which can claim that it has always been free from any symptom of this licentious fever. "Four weeks from this time," says the *New York Review* of May 15, "there will be only two theatres in New York that will offer dramatic work. The rest will be show-shops, having as little to do with dramatic art as so many corner groceries."

This is specific, certainly, and not merely the excited imaginings of a prudish woman. Fourteen theatres out of sixteen given over to burlesque or spectacle or "naked drama" is a vastly higher proportion than have ever been given over to musical comedy in your day or mine, let alone to the spectacles — such as the "Follies" — at which our modern censors grow rosy. As I write, in the spring of 1924, there are seventeen musical comedies and so called "reviews" being exhibited in New York at the Broadway theatres. There are at the same time thirty-seven plays, including works by Shakespeare, Rostand, Pirandello, Shaw, and Molnar,

a revival of Mrs. Mowatt's *Fashion*, and at least half a dozen new American dramas of serious value as interpretations of our life. So much for the Palmy Days!

Considered historically, we might perhaps blame the Civil War for the conditions Miss Logan describes and let it go at that, were it not for the fact that the same phenomenon was more or less visible in England, whence, indeed, the blonde and shameless Lydia came to us. Burlesque, in the strict sense of entertainment based on the art of parody and topsy-turvy, by preference the *reductio ad absurdum* of some serious drama, had for many years been a popular form of entertainment in both countries, and at its best, certainly a legitimate and delightful one. But of course, it was a form which readily lent itself to the intrusions of spectacle, and its debasement was a simple matter under one of those waves of lubricity which seem more or less periodically to break over our Anglo-Saxon play-house.

The evil may not have been wholly devoid of good, however. Possibly such occurrences in the theatre answer for us the purpose of that orgy which the late William James recommended as an occasional corrective for too much Chautauqua.

At any rate, while the solemn critics across the water were complaining of the inundation of opera

HELEN WESTERN IN "THE FRENCH SPY"

bouffe, — itself productive of much delightful music, — on this side the "naked drama" of Miss Logan was splitting into the vulgar form that we of a later day have chiefly known as "burlesque," the direct descendent of these entertainments Miss Logan describes; into musical comedy, or imported opera bouffe, where the sane elements of mirth and music were salvaged; and finally into true burlesque again, the original core of the matter, which persisted in various places, generally in connection with musical comedy, flowered to perfection once again with Weber and Fields, and may still sometimes be found in our present-day reviews.

The net result of it all was probably to increase the vogue and brighten the character of musical shows in the better theatres, but ultimately to affect very little the ethical character of the shows in the cheaper theatres, which have always contrived to serve the goddess Lubricity in one way or another.

After reading Miss Logan's chapters, I poked around in the dust of my cupboards till I unearthed a file of the *Galaxy* for 1868–69. This magazine, published in New York, commented frequently on the theatre, one of Miss Logan's chapters, indeed, appearing therein. In the issues of August and November 1869, I found articles by Richard

Grant White on "The Age of Burlesque" and "The Play of the Period," which were curious commentaries on Miss Logan's strictures; curious because written from so different an angle. Lydia Thompson did not greatly trouble Mr. White. From his accounts of our stage you get more the impression of universal tomfoolery than universal depravity. What roused him was the kind of play the public patronized in 1869, when it wasn't going to burlesque — for, in spite of Miss Logan's gloom, New Yorkers had the opportunity that year to see Jefferson play *Rip Van Winkle*, John E. Owens play *Solon Shingle*, Maggie Mitchell play *Fanchon*, — which my mother assures me was a quite unforgettably beautiful and eerie performance, — Miss Bateman play *Leah*, and Lester Wallack's company revive *The School for Scandal*. Finally, on both sides of the water, Boucicault's *Formosa*—the *Brown of Harvard* of its day — was being hailed with delight.

It was upon the Boucicault *opus* that Mr. White fell with fury. "Lydia Thompson is better than this," he cried. "Burlesque is better than this. And why? Because burlesque makes no pretense: it has no purpose but amusement. . . . Its only end is entertainment . . .which the world is now so much in need of. But *Formosa* is false, tawdry,

a pretense, a tricking out of sensationalism and flat commonplaces. Its motive is not dramatic at all; it is purely spectacular." And that sort of thing — he goes on to say — is the only kind of legitimate drama the public will pay for. Wallack's revival of *The School for Scandal* lasted only two weeks.

Rip Van Winkle and *Solon Shingle*, in spite of the acting, he found almost equally poor stuff as drama. He makes this interesting observation on the effect of Jefferson's acting at that time: "Those parts of the play that best please his audiences are the tipsy scenes and the dénouement — the very passages in which Irving's conception is degraded; and when the actor represents Rip as waking from sleep to woe, and elevated by mystery and sadness above himself, so that the white-haired, white-bearded face turns upon you with an expression worthy of the grief of half-crazed Lear, the people laugh."

In later years they did not laugh. At any rate, this person did not laugh. A child of eight, he nearly cried his eyes out when he first saw the play, and he never witnessed it, to the end of Jefferson's life, without a cleansing sadness and a sense of poetry. But when White says that the play, if read, "would be intolerable," he is forced to agree. It is a very bad play. That fact, and not

the fear of later actors to challenge Jefferson, has kept it on the shelf. Plenty of actors have challenged Booth in *Hamlet*.

Richard Grant White, as we have intimated, was not much troubled by the moral depravity of burlesque. And it must be admitted that as we read descriptions to-day — or hear some very old man reminiscently furnish them — of the burlesques in which excellent actors as well as females in tights took part, we can imagine moments, at least, of hilarious and harmless entertainment. When, for example, George L. Fox, the clown, played Hamlet in the style of Edwin Booth, giving almost a straight performance till the Ghost said "Swear," and then replying with a loud "Damn!" we fancy our mirth would have been greater than our moral indignation. Or when William J. Florence, at what later became Daly's Theatre, on Broadway near 30th Street, assumed the part of Francis First, in *The Field of the Cloth of Gold*, and put on the gloves with Henry Eighth to settle the matter of international supremacy, we should probably have failed to summon up the blush of shame. We are reminded a little of the recent decision of a motion-picture censorship board. A "comic" depicted a man committing suicide by leaping into a hogshead of whiskey, the title read-

EUGENE O'NEILL, EXPONENT OF THE NATIVE DRAMA

Photograph by Muray, New York

ing, "O Death, where is thy sting?" The censors forbade this, on the ground that it was sacrilegious. We fear Miss Logan would have felt quite comfortable on a board of censors. Richard Grant White, however, was an "intellectual." His objection to burlesque was on the ground of its inanity.

In the *Galaxy*, during 1869, a serial was running, called *Put Yourself in His Place*, by an author named Charles Reade, and in the August installment occurred this sentence: "Come, young lady, I know it is an age of burlesque, but let us spare the sacraments, and the altar, and such trifles." Oddly enough, in the same issue of the magazine, White had chosen the words, "An Age of Burlesque," for the title of his article. The phenomenon was international.

The deduction White drew from the age of burlesque was that men's tempers are ever changing and that the age was no longer equal to a grand scene of passion, nor would its nerves bear the strain of intellectual attention on the stage. He found and quoted similar statements among the English dramatic reviews, and closed his article with the following paragraph: —

> The drama, as an intellectual diversion of the mind from one channel of thought to another, has passed away, I think, forever. The public — even the culti-

vated public — in all countries prefers that kind of theatrical entertainment at which it is not required to think. It asks, not diversion, a turning of the mind from one object to another, but the pleasure of the senses while the mind lies dormant. It seeks only to be amused. Of this mood, burlesque or spectacular extravaganza is the natural and inevitable product. We, of the Anglo-Saxon race at least, have probably seen the last of our legitimate drama.

That of course is far more radical pessimism than Miss Logan was capable of, or probably could comprehend. For her, the stage of 1869 had lost its morals. For Richard Grant White it had lost its emotions and its mind. Between them, they seemed to have left it little enough!

Yet, to-day, we cheerfully endure the intellectual strain of Shaw, Galsworthy, Brieux; Shakespeare is still with us; we have a lusty — if still often crude — native drama which seeks significance in the commonplace and strives to interpret as well as amuse. We have our modern equivalents of *Formosa*, to be sure, and probably we always shall have. We also have legs, and probably we shall always have them, too. They are, however, more slender and attractive than they used to be, and we have learned to admit their beauty without a blush, which is a step forward. But Miss Logan to-day could go to thirty-seven theatres in New

York without being shocked by the sight of them, and Mr. White could find in at least a dozen of those same thirty-seven theatres the dramatic and dynamic exposition of character, the clash of roused emotions, the interpretative function of the dramatist at work — in short, the things his soul hungered for at the play, and could not find in 1869. Truly, it seems hardly the time for us old fellows to prate of the Palmy Days.

[Curtain]

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